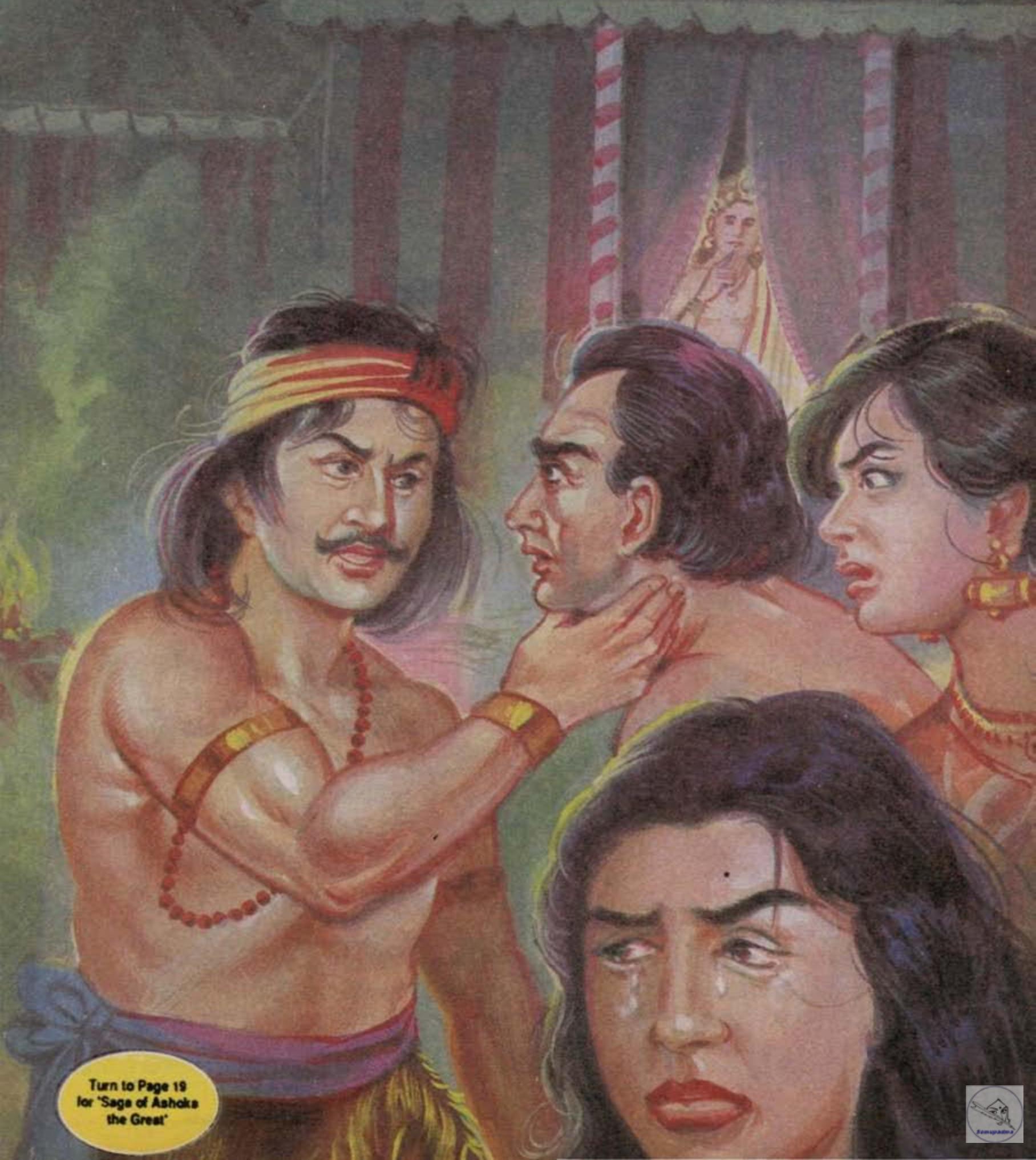


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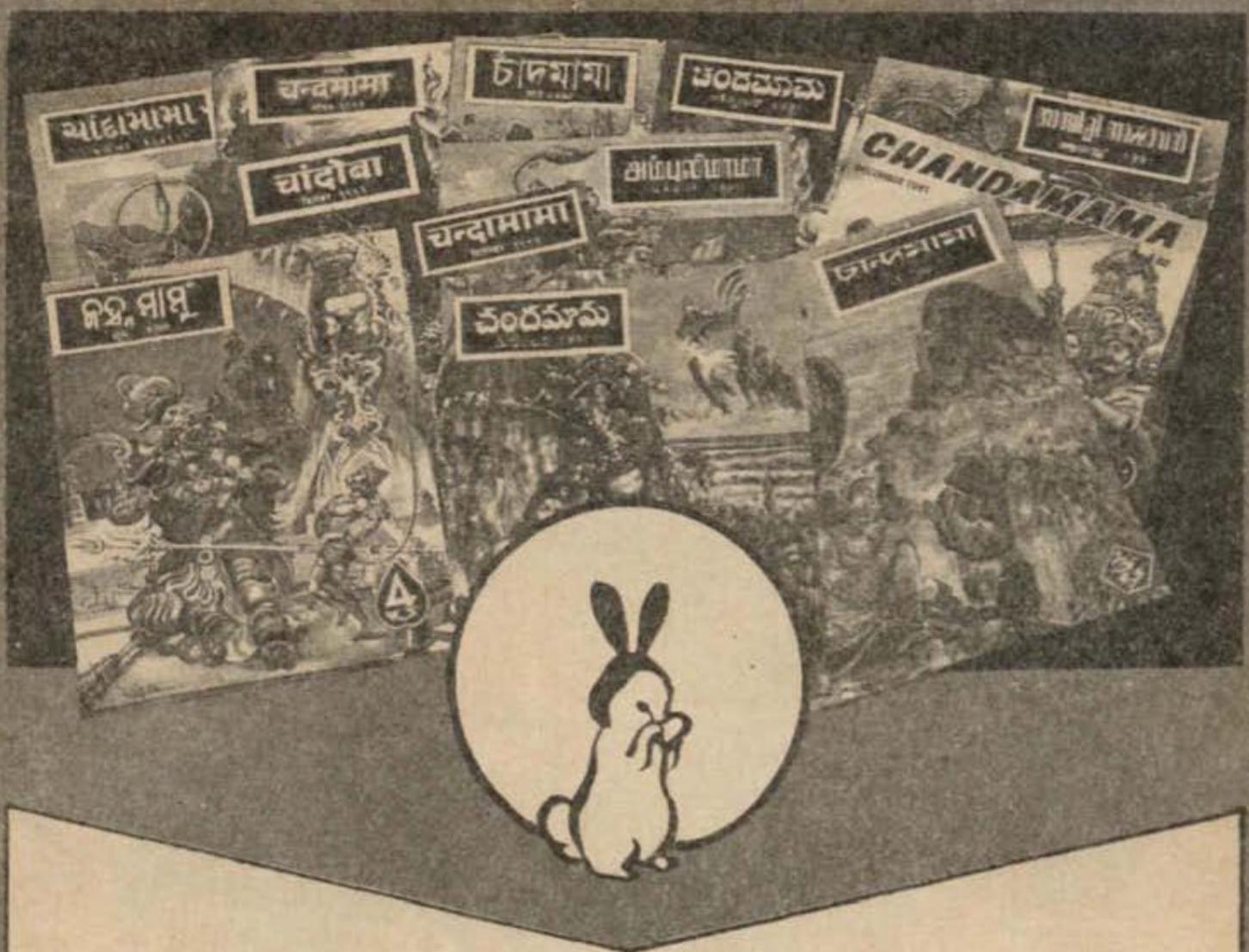
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CONTENTS

IN THIS ISSUE

NEXT ISSUE

Vol. 27 SEPTEMBER 1996 No. 3

Stories :

Real Intellectual	... Page 7
Saga Of Ashoka	
The Great - 8	... Page 19
A Better Businessman	... Page 25
The Bridegroom	
For The Princess	... Page 37
Stories From	
Mahabharata - 23	... Page 49
Self - Praise	... Page 54
A Ghost For A Cook	... Page 60

Picture Stories :

Immortal Friendship - 5	... Page 14
-------------------------	-------------

Chandamama Pull-Out :

Coastal Journeys - 12	... Page 33
-----------------------	-------------

Features :

A Second Term For Yeltsin	... Page 6
News Flash	... Page 13
Towards Better English	... Page 18
Chandamama	
Supplement - 95	... Page 42
Chandamama	
Golden Hour - 6	... Page 45
New World Records At Atlanta	Page 56

Vol.27 OCTOBER 1996 No. 4

HUMILITY: Dharmakumar is conceited whenever he meets common people; but he is full of humility before the officials of the kingdom. With their help, he manages to get promotion in his post. One day, he gets the shock of his life: dismissal from the king's service. He approaches Sukirti, the minister, with a request to put in a kind word to the king. He asks Dharmakumar to accompany him to the palace. The minister praises him, but the king is not impressed, because complaints have already reached him. What kind of complaints? wonders the former official.

MONKEY-TRICK: Gopal loses his father when he is a mere boy. As his death takes place suddenly, he does not leave any savings for his wife and son. The mother finds it difficult to make both ends meet. The boy grows up and is interested only in eating and sleeping. His mother tells him that he should do business with the help of their neighbour about to leave for another country. Gopal gives him some money. He brings a monkey for Gopal. How can he do business with a monkey? **COASTAL JOURNEYS** takes you along the east in its concluding instalments, while the comics **IMMORTAL FRIENDSHIP** reaches its climax.

Plus the leisure-time fun feature **GOLDEN HOUR** in a new format.

Printed by B.V. REDDI at Prasad Process Private Ltd, 188 N.S.K. Salai, Madras - 600 026 (India) and published by B. VISWANATHA REDDY on behalf of CHANDAMAMA PUBLICATIONS, Chandamama Buildings, Vadapalani, Madras - 600 026 (India). The stories, articles and drawings contained herein are the exclusive property of the publishers and copying or adapting them in any manner will be dealt with according to law.





Founder: CHAKRAPANI

Controlling Editor : NAGI REDDI

Protecting Childhood

In June, Labour Ministers from nearly 180 countries met in Geneva and decided to put an end to child exploitation – employing children in labour-intensive jobs. What would have prompted them to take such a solemn decision? we may wonder. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) presented them with some statistics – like 73,000,000 boys and girls between 10 and 14 in Asia (India, Indonesia) and Africa (Ghana, Senegal) were in employment in 1995. The ILO report stated this was only the 'tip of the iceberg', and the real number could run into hundreds of millions.

Another revelation was that 25 per cent of the children in employment hand over their earnings to their parents or the relatives with whom they stay. Which means, it is an economic compulsion for them to augment the income of the family. We will have to wait and see how these nations of the world are going to tackle the problem.

Meanwhile, a ray of hope has come from the industrialists of India. In pockets where child labour is rampant, they will introduce measures to raise the income of the family, so that the children of that family will be freed from forced employment and probably given opportunities to study and facilities to play.

The President of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), while speaking in Madras the other day, said their immediate target is the womenfolk of economically weaker sections, more of whom will be taken on jobs, which indirectly would enhance their earning capacity. A good beginning.

A TV commercial jingle begs repetition any number of times: *Let children enjoy their childhood; they have only one.*

A second term for Yeltsin

Mr. Boris Yeltsin was sworn in as Russia's President for the second term on August 9. The simple ceremony, which was held at the Palace of Congresses in the Kremlin, in Moscow, and watched by a gathering of nearly 5,000 people, lasted just about 15 minutes in view of his indisposition. Soon after the second round of the Presidential elections in July, in which he was declared winner, he went to a sanatorium for convalescence for a fortnight. He came back to office on August 6 in time for the swearing in ceremony.

In the first round of elections held on June 16, neither Mr. Yeltsin nor his main rival, the Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, was able to muster enough percentage of votes. The other principal candidates were the leader of the Democratic Party, Mr. Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, the former President of the Soviet Union, on whose resignation in December 1991, then Prime Minister Mr. Yeltsin took over as President of the Russian Federation.

The 65-year-old Russian leader was confident that he would get elected in the first round itself. However, his ill-health, Russia's unsuccessful war with rebellious Chechnya, a member of the Federation, and the resultant economic recession had all affected his election pros-

pects. In January, in the election of the speaker of the Duma (the lower house of Parliament), the candidate of the Communist Party was elected. Followed a clamour for the return of Communist rule which had collapsed with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Communist leader Mr. Zyuganov promised to reunite the former republics of the Soviet Union.

In his first election speech, Mr. Gorbachev said democracy faced a threat if either Mr. Yeltsin or Mr. Zyuganov were to rule the country. On the other hand, the Democratic Party leader, Mr. Zhirinovsky, suggested power should be shared between the three leaders, leaving Mr. Gorbachev out of the picture. He suggested that if such a coalition was agreed upon, then the Presidential election could even be done away with.

A pre-election survey early in June gave Mr. Yeltsin 35 per cent of the votes and Mr. Zyuganov 24 per cent. It was felt that a second round would be inevitable with only the two of them left in the fray. The second round was more decisive and Mr. Yeltsin was declared the victor.

It appears there was a joke circulating among the people. The Chief of Security went to Mr. Yeltsin, who said: "Give me the bad news first." The Chief told him that his Communist rival might win with 68 per cent of the votes. The President then asked him to spell out the good news, and the Chief is reported to have said: "Sir, you'll get 78 per cent!" Mr. Yeltsin must have heaved a sigh of relief.





Real Intellectual

Narayana did not go for any work. People were willing to give him work. He would promise to go, but would never turn up. The villagers were frustrated; his people were fed up; and his family was desperate. He earned the epithet "lazy-bones". Of course, he did not mind it. He remained lazy as ever.

How to reform him, became the talk of the village. One day, his uncle Nataraj arrived. Whoever met him had only complaints about Narayana. He was worried about his nephew. He called Narayana and gave him a lot of advice. The young man listened to him in silence and then asked: "Uncle, what sin have I committed? Let them answer!"

"That's not the question, Narayana," retorted his uncle. "You've to earn your livelihood, haven't you? For that, you must have some job. How long can you remain without doing any work? Or just lazing around? Do you think your brothers will look after you

once your parents leave this world?"

Narayana had a counter-argument. "All right. I go for work and make an earning. Is there any guarantee that whatever I save won't be stolen by thieves? I'm a thinker. And thinkers don't bother about anything!"

Nataraj wondered how his nephew could claim to be a thinker. How can anyone who claims to be an intellectual have any intelligence, any wisdom? "Oh, so you claim to be a wise man?" said Nataraj sarcastically. "All right, but are you doing anything to justify your claim? Only then can your life be complete."

"Lead a perfect life? Make a name? What do you mean, uncle?" queried Narayana.

"If you do something which would be remembered by the people even after you pass away, only then would you have achieved something in your life. Don't you know all this, you who claim to be a knowledgeable person?" explained Nataraj. He was



for you!"

"What you say is not very correct, Uncle," said Narayana. "I've already achieved my life's ambition. I'm not anybody despised by the people. There's a sage-like person here called Anandtheertha. He's always in praise of me. You ask him and he'll have a lot of things to say about me."

"Who's that sage?" wondered Nataraj. "Where has he come from? I must meet him."

"You come along with me," said Narayana. "You know there's a small clearing near the riverside. He comes there every evening. You can come with me and listen to him."

Nataraj was now very keen to meet Anandtheertha. If anybody were to like a lazy-bones like Narayana, he must be an extraordinary person! If that be true, then who was to be blamed? Narayana's parents? Neighbours? The people? Or was the sage being cheated?

That evening Narayana left for the riverside early. Soon afterwards Nataraj also reached the place. As they waited Anandtheertha arrived. Instantly, Narayana jumped up and made his obeisance to the sage. "Please sit down," said Anandtheertha.

"When a great man like you is standing, how can I sit down?" said Narayana with great humility. "That won't be proper."

"Speaking of great men," remarked Anandtheertha, "could there be any-

trying his level best to push some wisdom into his nephew. He hoped the young man would have a change for the better.

"Oh! I didn't know that," responded Narayana. "If that be so, why aren't people mentioning the names of my grandfather or any of my other forefathers? They have all been forgotten the moment their physical bodies left the earth. Nobody is ever remembering them. All right, you tell me, what shall one do so that one will be remembered later? What did my forefathers do? They too lived their lives."

"You seem to be an adept at arguing, Narayana!" commented Nataraj. "But what's the use? Not a single person shows any respect or regard



body greater than you? You're an intellectual. A sage may take even a hundred years to acquire that much wisdom. As you're moving around with people like us, many don't know your real worth. You deserve to be in the company of intellectuals and wise men. People might have learnt the *Vedas*; but how many of them would have really understood the teachings? Whereas, you have not only learnt the *Vedas*, but are able to explain the teachings to others."

"All that I have acquired only by your grace, swami!" said Narayana. "My share is very little."

"I'm keen to extend our conversation," said Anandtheertha, "but today I'm hard-pressed for time. I don't know when I'll be fortunate to spend some time with you." He then left the place in a hurry.

Nataraj was all the while listening to the conversation between his nephew and Anandtheertha, and wasn't he surprised? He moved closer to where Narayana was standing bidding farewell to Anandtheertha. "What spell of magic have you cast, Narayana?" he asked in wonderment. "That swami seems to have been completely won over by you. He was praising you to the seventh heavens!"

"Uncle, the people here are all praise for Anandtheertha alike," said Narayana, "and that swami has something nice to say about me. So, don't you think I'm great in my own way? If you've any doubt, why don't you check up with the people?"

In the next two or three days, Nataraj went round talking to different people. They all had one good thing or another to say about



Anandtheertha. One person said he was a great pundit; another described him as an expert artist; yet another opined that the swami was an economist. Each one saw him differently, but they had only good things to say about Anandtheertha.

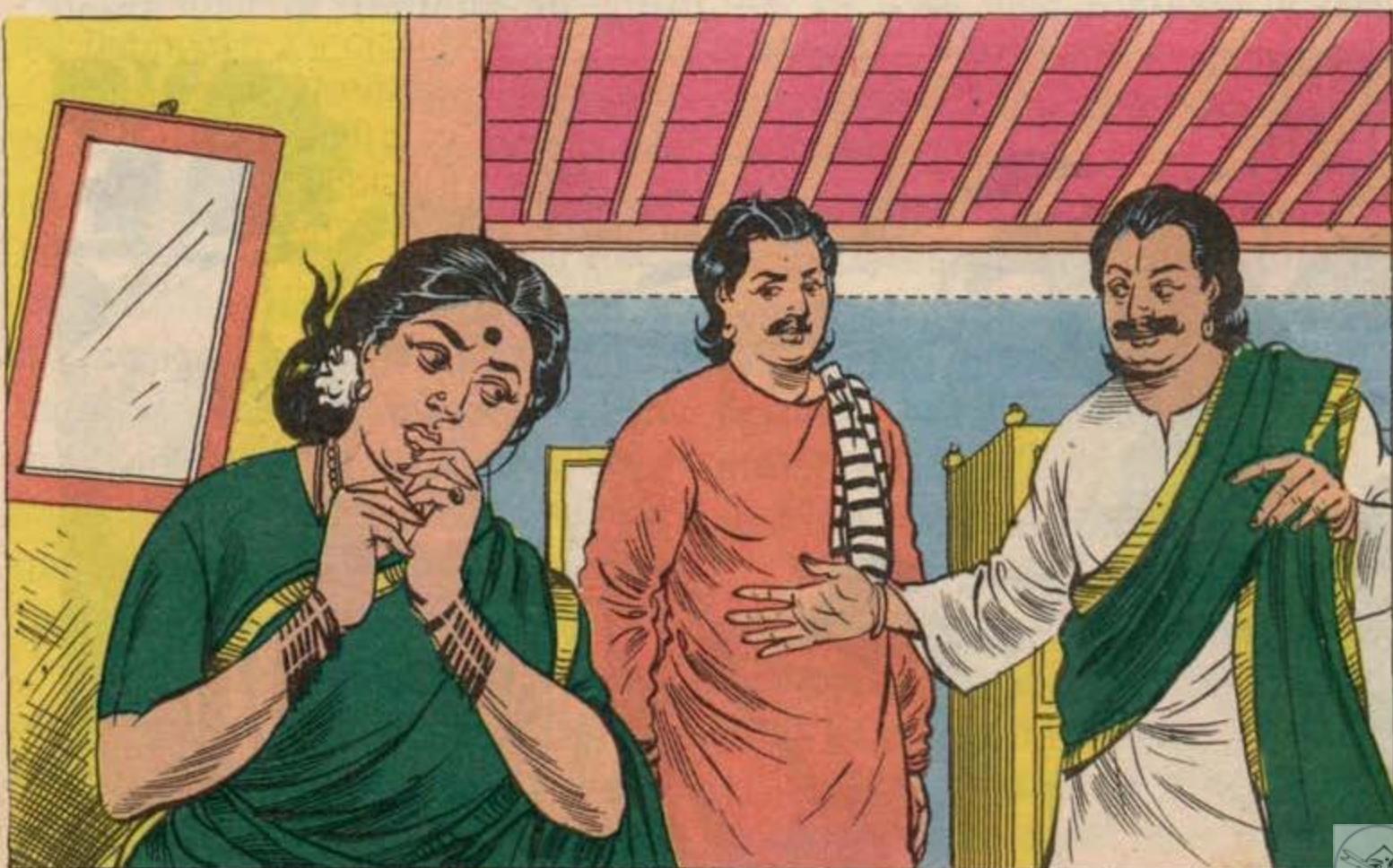
All right, but how did such a person come to see the good side of Narayana? This was what stupefied his uncle. He went back to Narayana's parents, and asked them about their son. His father said, "If someone praises someone else, I feel, the one who praises attains greatness than the one who receives the praise. That way, the swami is great, and not my son, Narayana."

Nataraj thought that his brother-in-law was very practical. The young man's mother remarked, "Brother, somehow I've a feeling that Narayana

has some mysterious powers. And I've been asking his father to find out what it is. But he has never heeded my suggestion. Perhaps that swami has been able to find out the talent in Narayana. That's why he's praising my son. You'd better find out from Anandtheertha himself what special things he has seen in Narayana."

Nataraj thought here was a mother's affection for her own child. People might call Narayana a lazy-bones, but his mother was not willing to accept such a judgement.

He started in search of Anandtheertha and soon found out where he was staying. He paid his obeisance and introduced himself. "I'm glad to have met you," said Anandtheertha. "What can I do for you? Just tell me, and I shall do it gladly."



Nataraj thought he could now get into the problem straight away. "Oh! I just want to know as to what makes you praise my nephew, Narayana, sky-high? What speciality or uniqueness have you seen in him?"

Anandtheertha was really expecting to hear something else from Nataraj—might be some extraordinary help or financial assistance, or something like that. He was, therefore, greatly surprised when he broke the topic of Narayana.

"Oh! Narayana?" said Anandtheertha, as if he did not know such a person! "I'm sorry I don't know anyone with such a name. I'm in the habit of praising everybody. If I have praised him, it only means that I have not made an exception of him. It is not as though I've seen any extraordinary merit or quality in him."

Nataraj was now left to bewilder. "Swami! Is it just to praise someone about whom one doesn't know anything? Especially for great men like you?"

"By praising someone, one doesn't lose anything," remarked Anandtheertha. "That'll only do him good," he added with a smile on his lips.

"If someone who is not good to his people or to his community, or who does not have any intelligence, won't his life go waste when he is showered with praise which he doesn't deserve?"

"Everyone has a trace of shame and pride," observed Anandtheertha.



"If someone is praised as an intellectual, and if he is really one, he'll only bow his head in humility and will not go about bragging about it. If the praise is given to one who is a dunce, and if he is sincere, he'll try to become an intellectual later in life. And he may succeed also."

Nataraj realised that it was a good study of human beings – a psychological approach. He told Anandtheertha, "The subject of our discussion has neither shame, nor pride. He's not keen to increase his knowledge or eager to improve his intelligence."

"All right," said Anandtheertha, "but how does it affect me? I'm not a loser. I only enjoy my work, my



attitude. Nobody has ever questioned me till now. Nobody has made fun of me. Instead, everybody praises me. And in return I praise them."

"You may be right, swami," said Nataraj, "but I would request you to change your attitude in the case of my nephew. Otherwise, this nincompoop will go about bragging that he's an intellectual. That'll be dangerous."

"Whoever is able to understand himself is the real intellectual," said Anandtheerth. "All others are fools. I won't be able to reform someone who doesn't have any intelligence. Self-realisation is the greatest knowledge?"

Nataraj would not easily give up. "Swami, don't you still think you should know all about someone before you start praising him?"

"No, it's not necessary," replied Anandtheerth. "Why should I waste time in knowing about other people? Should I spend time in finding out who's intelligent and wise, and who's not? I'd better do something else and

acquire more knowledge. Fools are not the subject of my study. When I meet them, I praise them."

Nataraj felt that his doubts had now been cleared. He went back to Narayana's residence and told him: "Narayana, I've acquired a lot of knowledge and wisdom from that swami. Now, I can't desist from praising you. There's no intellectual like you in this world." He then returned to his village.

Strangely, what his uncle had said created a sudden change in Narayana. Why should his uncle, of all persons in his family, praise him? He began contemplating. He realised that he was devoid of any knowledge. He did not want to take shelter under what Anandtheertha used to tell him.

Some days later, when Nataraj paid another visit to Narayana, he found that a lot of change had come over in his nephew. He was no more a lazy chap, and people too had changed their opinion about him.



NEWS FLASH

IMPOSITION WITH LOVE

Children are familiar with simple punishments, like 'imposition', when they are asked to write a word or a sentence several times over. For 30-year-old M. Raja Sheriff of Coimbatore, it was a self-imposed 'punishment', but he did it with a lot of appreciation of and admiration for the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, whose birth anniversary came off on August 20. He wrote the 11-letter name 8,500 times – no, not on a quire of paper, but on a single blue inland form that you get from the post office for 75 paise. He had to accommodate in all 93,500 letters of the English alphabet. After successfully completing his task in one week (two hours per day), he wrote to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, who met him and accepted the enframed inland form. In return, she gave him a photograph of Rajiv Gandhi autographed by her.

GOD-HEAD ON COINS

Embossing the head or bust of the country's ruler on its coins is a common practice. Commemorative coins, of course, will have the figures of famous men and women and popular leaders. In India, we have coins with the heads of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and Dr. Ambedkar. In Australia, till recently coins carried the head of Queen Elizabeth II. But now, that country has started minting coins with the figures of Hindu gods and goddesses – like Ganesa, Siva, and Parvati. The mint at Perth is bringing out these coins in gold. Some 20,000 coins with the portrait of "Siddhi

BHARATANATYAM MARATHON

It ultimately turned out to be another world record for 27-year-old Vidya Chandra Sekhar when she performed Bharatanatyam for 72 hours at a stretch. But she did this in memory of her father, who had died of a heart disease, and for raising funds to spread awareness about heart ailments. Some 600 people watched her performance at Troy, in Michigan, U.S.A., in June. By the time she stopped, she had developed blisters, besides injuring her left knee. A face marked by exhaustion, she was in tears – "tears for my father, whom I can't bring back; but you can love your families," she appealed to her audience. Seven years ago, she had created a world record by dancing non-stop for 48 hours. She then raised 10,000 dollars for the American Cancer Society and as her tribute to two children who had died of that dreaded disease.

"Vinayakar" were presented to the famous Vinayaka temple in Bombay, to mark the release of the coins.

TEMPLE IN LONDON

London now has its first Hindu temple in the area called Nesden. The idol is that of Narayana (Lord Vishnu), but there are as many as 26,300 other sculpted figures all over the temple, which is 70 ft tall and 25 ft X 195 ft in size. Material such as limestone, marble, or granite from Bulgaria, Italy and India, has been used in the construction. They were brought to Kandla port in Gujarat, and sculpted in Rajasthan by nearly 1,500 sculptors. The figures, pillars, side walls, and the flooring slabs were all taken to England by sea.



IMMORTAL FRIENDSHIP - 5

By BUJJAI

SINGHI
DORA SUG-
GESTS A
PLAN TO
PROTECT
SUMITRA
AND
GURUJI.

Brother, Singhi Dora! You're
risking your life for our sake.



No time to argue.
Must protect
Guruji! Give me
your dress.



AFTER A WHILE, SINGHI
DORA RETURNS WEAR-
ING SUMITRA'S CLOTHES.



Brother! You're a true friend!
We both are much indebted to
you.



People like you are rare!
May God protect you!



You both start sometime after
I go.



SINGHI
DORA AP-
PROACHES
THE HILL.

There he goes! Catch him!



I shall show my mettle to these
fools! Come! Come on!



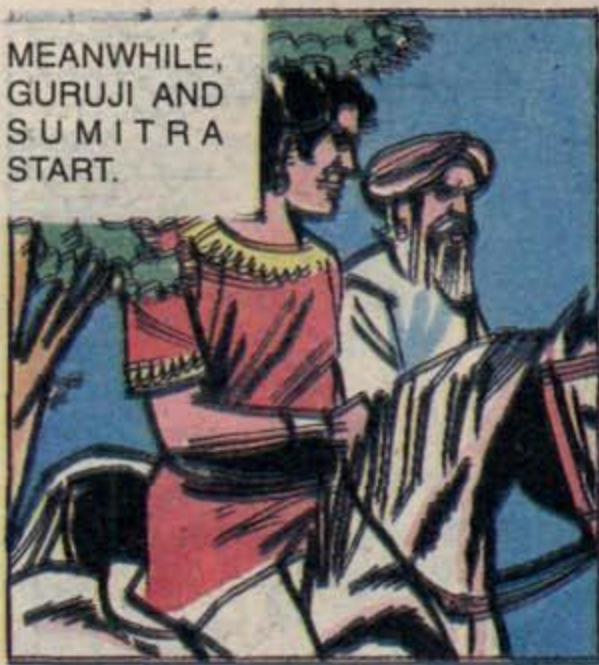
MISTAKING
SINGHI
DORA FOR
SUMITRA,
THE KING'S
MEN PUR-
SUE HIM,
WHILE HE
OUTRACES
THEM ON
HIS HORSE



SINGHI
DORA
GALLOPS
THROUGH
HILLS
AND
RIVERS.



MEANWHILE,
GURUJI AND
SUMITRA
START.



THE
KING'S
MEN ARE
NEARING
SINGHI
DORA, AS
HIS HORSE
GETS
TIRED.



MEANWHILE...

Thank god! We've
almost crossed the enemy land!



THERE THE
KING'S MEN
SURROUND
SINGHI DORA.



IGNORANCE IS THE MOTHER OF IMPUDENCE



SUMITRA, ALONG WITH GURUJI, REACHES THE FRONTIERS OF THEIR KINGDOM WHERE HE COMES UPON THE ROYAL GUARDS.

Dear soldiers! Take Guruji safely to the capital!



What about you?

I've to go back!



For what?

To save us, Singhi Dora has taken a great risk! I must go and see him.



Sir! Your wife has been delivered of a baby! You've a son!

Oh! God!



Sumitra! My son! It's risky to go there again.



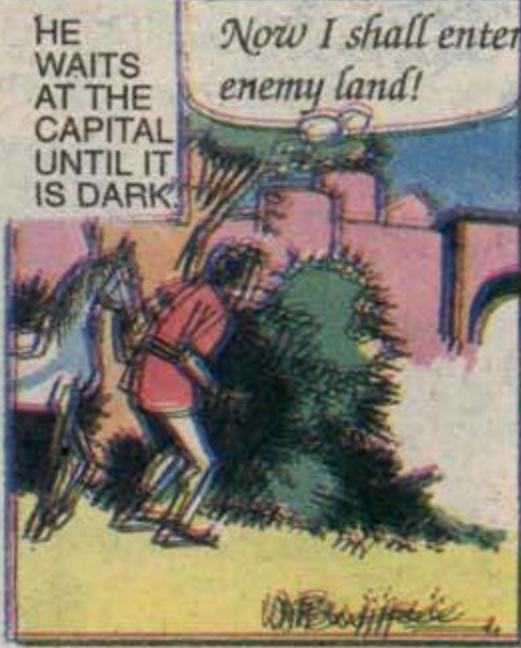
He risked his life to save us! Aren't we bound to find about his welfare?



SUMITRA HASTENS TO THE ENEMY KINGDOM AGAIN.



HE WAITS AT THE CAPITAL UNTIL IT IS DARK.



Now I shall enter enemy land!

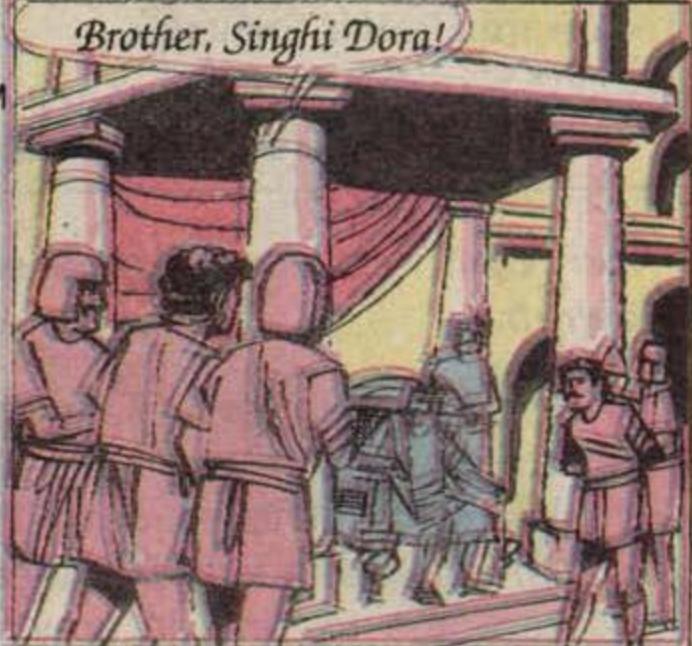
LAW-MAKERS SHOULD NOT BE LAW-BREAKERS



AS SOON AS SUMITRA SETS FOOT ON ENEMY LAND, THE ROYAL GUARDS SURROUND HIM AND...



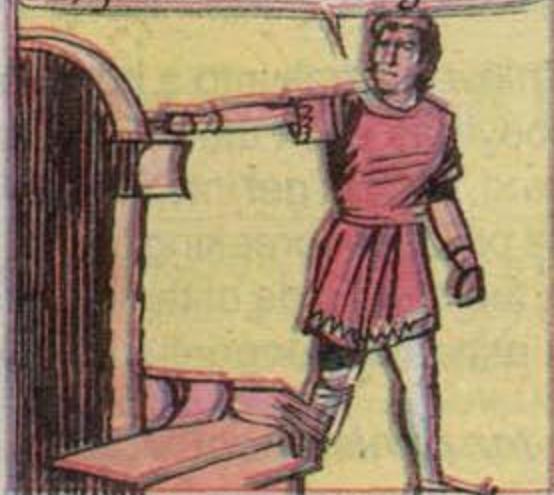
...TAKE HIM TO THE KING. SINGHI DORA IS ALSO THERE.



What! Who're you?



O King! I'm Sumitra from Vidarbha. Mistaking him for me, your men have caught him.



He's innocent, your majesty! Please release him. You may punish me!



Believe me, I don't know him! Why should he be punished for my sake? Pray, release him!



Brother, Singhi! Are you mad?



IDI^{LE} FOLKS HAVE THE LEAST LEISURE



As powerful as the Cardinal, but...

★ *Who is called "a grey eminence?" asks Swapna Banerjee, of Howrah.*

Anybody who is very influential, but prefers to remain in the background is referred to as 'a grey eminence'. In France, the powerful politician Cardinal Richelieu (Chief Minister from 1624) had a secretary and adviser called Pere Joseph, who was a friar and, therefore, wore a grey 'habit'. He earned the nickname 'the cardinal in grey' or 'eminence grise'—as powerful as the Cardinal himself, but not very visible.

★ *What does "to laugh on the other side of one's face" mean? asks Lakshmi Mhatre, of Dombivli, Bombay.*

Imagine this situation: Thieves break into a house and scamp away with their loot. Fortunately, nobody has seen them, nor has a hue and cry been raised. They are delighted and, in glee, get into their vehicle and speed away, when they are caught by the police for breaking traffic rules! The thieves can be said to have laughed on the other side of their faces, meaning they were made to feel disappointed, ashamed, or grief-stricken.

★ *Who is "a glutton for punishment"? asks B.R. Palanippan, of Virudhunagar.*

This expression is often mistaken for a derogatory term. It is not so. It only refers to someone who does not mind continue doing difficult jobs, unpleasant work, or unrewarding assignments. People are often heard exclaiming "thankless job!" or "all donkey's work!", still they agree to undertake such jobs.

★ *S. Ravichandra, of Ludhiana, wants to know how one can "play one's cards close to one's chest".*

Haven't you seen people play card games—like Bridge or Rummy. They take care to ensure that the other players do not get any chance to peep at the pack of cards they hold in their hands—by drawing them close to their chest. Likewise, if someone plans or carries out a course of action without letting anyone know what he or she intends to do, it is described as playing one's cards closet. To one's chest to 'keep one's counsel to oneself' is a similar expression.





SAGA OF ASHOKA THE GREAT

(The story so far: Of the several sons of King Bindusara of Magadha, two were prominent. They were Sushima, the Crown Prince, and Ashoka, born of a Brahmin queen. Both were ambitious, but while Sushima was vain and pleasure-loving, Ashoka was brave. He successfully suppressed a rebellion at Taxila and then was appointed as the King's Viceroy at Ujjain, the capital of the province of Avanti. On his way to Ujjain, he faced two murderers at Vidisha, but was saved by a young girl, Vidisha Devi.)

Yasa was cunning and clever. In front of the captured dancing girls, he tortured their male companion and told the girls, "You were about to kill Prince Ashoka. Your commonsense will certainly tell you that you deserve nothing less than death. Since die you must, why not speak the truth? Maybe, your punishment in hell will be less severe!" he said.

The dancing girls looked at each other. The older one said, "Listen to

us with compassion, O brave nobleman. We don't have any fear of hell, since we don't know how that place is. But we fear torture and death. You'll gain nothing by torturing and killing us, but we can perhaps be of some help to you if you grant us pardon. We will of course, speak the truth."

"First speak it. Then it will be for the prince to decide your fate," said Yasa.

"We practically followed the



prince and his party right from Pataliputra. We are courtesans and we work for the man who pays us. We are not Prince Ashoka's enemies though employed by *his* enemies," said the girl.

"And who're his enemies – your paymasters?"

"Pray, first promise us that you'll spare our lives," said the elder girl.

"No bargain. Speak out the truth or you die!" shouted Yasa.

"Nobleman! We were given the task of killing Prince Ashoka by none other than the Crown Prince himself!" the girl blurted out.

"Is it true?" asked Prince Ashoka as he came out of his tent.

The two girls spoke in detail how

they were invited by Sushima into his apartment and given a thousand gold coins and a diamond ring each and were promised much more after they accomplished their task. The people they named and the rings they showed left Yasa and Ashoka in no doubt about the veracity of their confession.

After they had been thoroughly examined, Ashoka clapped his hands thrice. Two hefty and ferocious-looking soldiers rushed in.

"You can take them away and do what is necessary," ordered Ashoka.

Panic writ large on the faces of the two girls, they raised their tied hands to their forehead: "Where are they taking us, O noble prince?" they asked.

"Where you wished to send me!" snapped Ashoka.

"Oh no!" shrieked out the girls, tears rolling down their cheeks.

"Don't cry, my unfortunate sisters, don't cry. Pray to Sakyamuni, the Buddha, and his compassion will save you just as it saved our noble prince," uttered a very sweet voice, charged with pity and faith. It was Vidisha Devi's. She had just entered the tent.

"My dear sister, don't give them any false hope!" said Yasa in a firm voice.

"My brother, is it I who am giving them hope? Remember, you had promised to spare their lives!" said

Vidisha, smiling through tears.

"How can an intelligent girl like you speak such nonsense, Vidisha?" challenged Yasa.

"My brother, didn't you say that they should speak out the truth or die? Doesn't that mean that their speaking the truth was the alternative to their death? How can you go back on your word?" rejoined Vidisha.

"Wonderful!" Ashoka clapped his hands, smiling. "How lucky you are, my friend Yasa, to have a sister like this?"

Yasa looked surprised, while Vidisha looked delighted. Gratefulness for Vidisha brightened up the faces of the two girls.

"Do you really mean to set them free?" asked Yasa.

"I mean it, if Vidisha wants that. But she has to pay a price for it," said Ashoka.

"I shall gladly pay it, O Prince, if it's within my capacity. Tell me what it is," Vidisha waited for a reply.

"It is a heavy price, so heavy that I'm scared of quoting it," said Ashoka haltingly and almost blushing. "But I will confide it to Yasa."

A brief flash of smile played on Yasa's lips. Vidisha left the tent at a hint from him. Prince Ashoka asked his guards to take the girls and the male prisoner elsewhere.



The Saka chieftain of Vidisha and his wife at first could not believe their



ears when Yasa told them the fond desire of Prince Ashoka to marry their daughter. But Yasa said, "I can tell you, from whatever I've heard of Ashoka and from my feelings about him, now that I know him, he is as ambitious as any prince, but he is simple and noble at heart. He belongs to our clan. He's going to be the ruler of the prosperous province of Avanti. Our dear Vidisha would become almost a queen..."

"Is that how you have understood Vidisha who, you claim, is like your very own sister?" asked Vidisha as she came in. "Do you believe that my happiness lies in my becoming a queen?"

Yasa laughed in an embarrassed



manner. "Well, my sweet sister, is there a brother in the world who would not be proud to see his sister enthroned as a queen? I'm excited, truly delighted. I cannot understand how you can have any hesitation in regard to accepting the proposal!" he said.

"My son!" spoke Vidisha's mother. "At first the proposal sounded too good to be true. But I realise that my daughter is no ordinary girl. Besides, shouldn't we see the hand of Providence in the chain of events? Why should Prince Ashoka camp here? Who led my child Vidisha to save him from a fall, and who arranged for both you and my child to come to the prince's rescue when the assassins were about to kill him?"

At last spoke Vidisha's father. "It

appears to me that my daughter's life is linked with that of the prince. She couldn't have otherwise become his saviour twice in the course of a day and a night!"

All the three now looked at Vidisha. Tears drizzled in her eyes. She folded her hands and, looking upward, muttered, "O Tathagata Buddha, guide me out of this utterly confused state of my mind. It had been my determination to embrace the career of a hermitess, to follow the path shown by you and to achieve Nirvana. I had never nourished any desire for worldly joy or glory. Why am I required to face such a dilemma?"

There was silence. The spell was broken by Vidisha herself. "I do not know what is right and what is wrong for me. To be honest, I can't trust the



advice of my parents in this matter, for they desire my worldly happiness. What can be a better luck for their daughter than marrying a prince and a good noble one at that? There is only one person who can give me sound advice and he is Guru Upagupta."

"Right," said Yasa. Vidisha's parents too nodded in agreement.

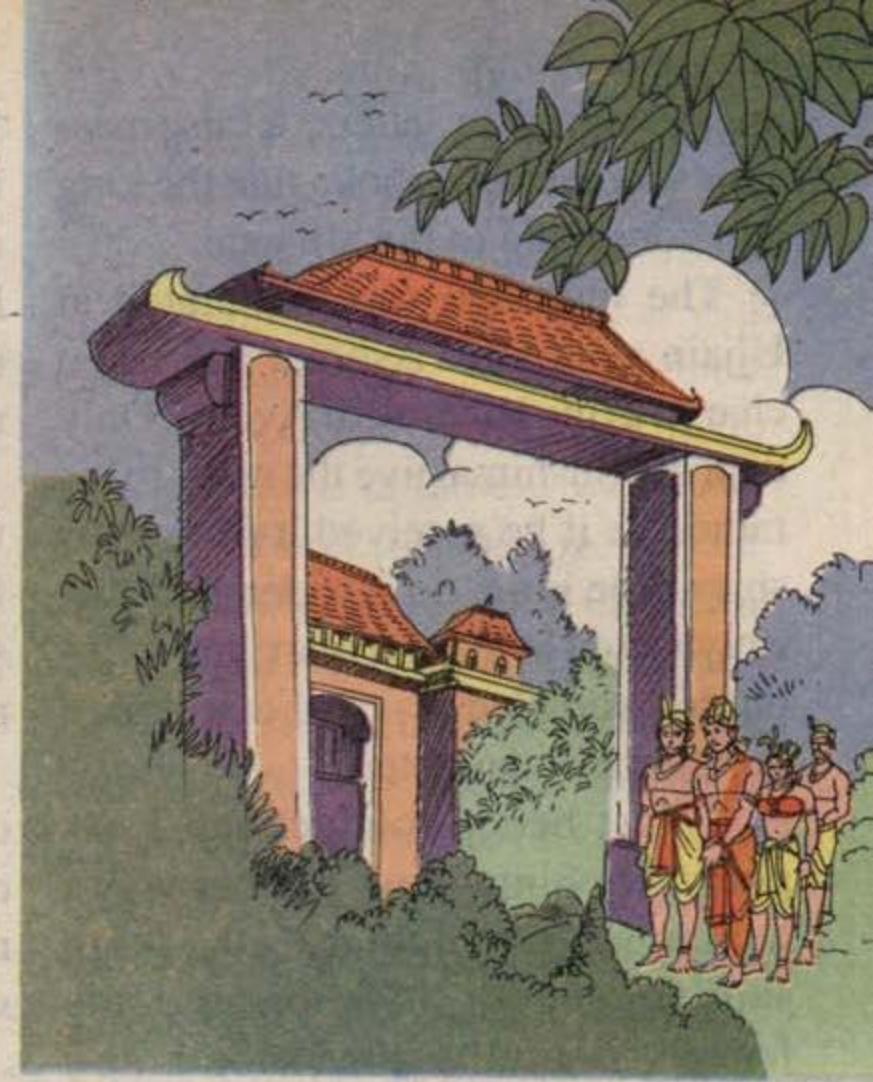
It was known that Upagupta was arriving in Vidisha the very next day. Prince Ashoka, when he was told of Vidisha's wish, happily consented to wait.

Vidisha met her spiritual master in private. While her parents and Yasa were waiting with anxiety outside the Vihara, at some distance, under a tree, stood Prince Ashoka himself.

Vidisha emerged from Sage Upagupta's room, her face grim yet radiating an aura. All were full of suspense. Surprisingly, Vidisha gave out a meaningful smile to Yasa and said, "Why is your friend, the prince, standing so aloof from you if he is destined to be close to you?"

Yasa's face brightened up. He ran to the prince and almost dragged him near Vidisha and her parents.

"Listen, O noble Prince, my guru has asked me to agree to your kind proposal, but on condition that you, in return, should agree to let me follow the path of Dharma as prescribed by the Buddha," said Vidisha, her



voice marked by a serenity.

"I agree to the condition, O Vidisha Devi!" said Ashoka.

"Thank you. I don't know why the guru believes that my marriage with you will serve the cause of the Enlightened One. But I've full faith in the guru and I'm ready to abide by his advice," said Vidisha, bowing down to her parents, Ashoka, and Yasa.



The messenger, who carried letters from the Sakya chieftain and Ashoka to King Vindusara, seeking his kind permission for the marriage and his blessings, was not able to meet the king. One of the courtiers, a friend of Sushima, bribed the messenger



and destroyed the letters. A false message was sent to Ashoka that the king had consented to the alliance.

The marriage was celebrated at Ujjain soon after Ashoka had taken charge as the Viceroy of Avanti. Only then did Sushima give the news to his father, as if he received it from their spies. The king, no wonder, was terribly vexed at his son marrying without his knowledge – and that, too, a commoner's daughter.

"What better conduct can I expect from him whose mother was a commoner's daughter?" the king said in anger. Sushima and his friends gleefully spread the king's comment. The only one to shed tears was Queen Subhadra, Ashoka's mother.

Once again there was a rebellion at Taxila. The king summoned

Sushima. "My son, it'll be difficult to recall Ashoka from far away Ujjain and send him to quell the rebellion. Either you or one of your other brothers must proceed to Taxila, leading an army. What do you say?"

Sushima was not at all pleased with the alternatives. He had no confidence in his own capacity. At the same time, his unwillingness to go might show him as a coward.

"Father, I deem it my duty to proceed to Taxila. Obviously, Ashoka did not do a good job. Otherwise, no rebellion could have raised its head so soon once again," he said.

"I fear the hands of the Greeks. They know that I'm ill. They've never been able to forget that they lost their Indian empire to the Mauryas," commented the king.

– To continue



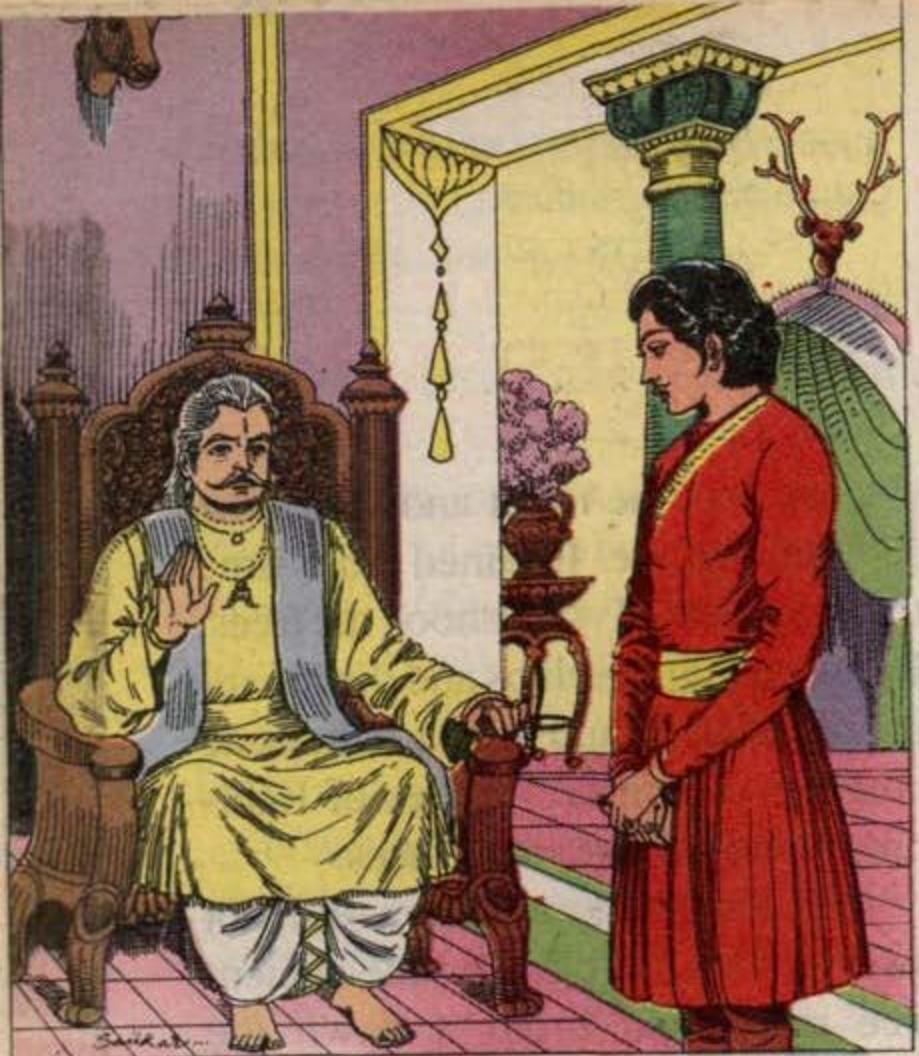
A BETTER BUSINESSMAN

Dark was the night and weird the atmosphere. It rained from time to time; gusts of wind shook the trees. Between thunderclaps and the moaning of jackals could be heard the eerie laughter of spirits. Flashes of lightning revealed fearsome faces.

But King Vikramaditya did not swerve a bit. He climbed the ancient tree again and brought down the corpse. However, as soon as he began crossing the desolate cremation ground, with the corpse lying on his shoulder, the vampire that possessed the corpse spoke: "O King! You seem to be making untiring efforts and without respite, as if you wish to achieve something. I pity you. Instead of enjoying comfortable sleep on a cozy bed, you're still coming after me. Why don't you give up your exercise? Or have you given any promise to, say, your parents or peers? Nothing wrong about it, but sometimes you may land yourself in trouble. That's what happened to Rajendra." The vampire then began narrating a story as they walked.

In Nagapuri lived a merchant, Nagendra, and his son Rajendra. He was a thriving merchant who made his millions. He hoped that his son





would share his burden and be of help to him to carry on the business. Being an only son, Rajendra enjoyed all comforts. He was interested only in spending the money his father earned. Before long, he took to evil ways, much to the chagrin and regret of his father. He wondered how he could reform his son, who was always in the company of his friends, on whom Rajendra spent lavishly. The father realised that if his son did not have access to money, then the friends might abandon him one after another, and perhaps Rajendra would change his attitude and behaviour.

One day, he called his son to his side. "Rajendra, you're no more a child. You're now grown up and ca-

pable of independent thinking and taking decisions for yourself. You must also be able to earn your own livelihood. I have been giving you money enough to meet your needs till now. Maybe you haven't yet come to realise the worth of money. You'll come to know that only when you start earning an income yourself. So, I'm telling you, my son, from tomorrow I shall not give you any money. Let me see how you're going to earn an income for yourself."

Rajendra was stupefied at his father's sudden decision. He was really worried. However, he did not express any protest or show any consternation on his face. "Yes, father, I shall try something on my own," he said, as he put out a weak smile.

The young man was almost sure that his friends would come to his help. He told them that he would need some money to start a business. They were quite willing to help him with money, but on one condition he should take them as his partners. That was something not quite acceptable to him. He contemplated for long and then decided to approach his father himself. Unashamedly, he went back to Nagendra.

"Having money in your hands will not be enough to do business," the father cautioned his son. "You have also to be somewhat clever in handling the money judiciously. Don't think it's easy to do business."



"I know that, father," agreed Rajendra. "I shall acquire that cleverness by and by. Right now, please give me some money. If you so need, I shall even give you a promissory note."

"That's all right, Rajendra," said Nagendra, sympathetically. "I shall lend you money, but before that I must put you to a test to find out how much clever you are. Only after that will I decide whether I should give you money or not." He then explained what he wanted Rajendra to do.

A little away from Nagapuri was Mangalpuri, where two merchants, Ramchander and Balchander, successfully carried on business. Rajendra had to go to them and be with them for six months each, learning the tricks of the trade. "When you come back, you've to tell me who of the two is more capable than the other. It's not an easy joke, mind you, because both of them have the same temperament and some mysterious powers, but Ramchander is short-tempered and will curse at the slightest pretext, while Balchander is mild-mannered and magnanimous by nature."

Soon, Rajendra started for Mangalpuri. Strangely, Nagendra did not give him any money even for his immediate needs, though he had made arrangements to look after him, without his knowledge. He first went to Ramchander. "I'm from



Nagapuri," he introduced himself. "I'm the son of the most famous merchant there. I wish to learn more about trade and business, that's why I've come here."

Ramchander looked at him for a long while, from head to foot. "All right, you may stay with me, like a friend," he agreed. "But beware! I'm notoriously short-tempered, so behave yourself, otherwise you'll earn my wrath and curse."

It was all a strange experience for Rajendra. Ramchander had two children – a son named Mohan, and a daughter, Mohana. He endeared himself to them and the two always heeded his advice and instructions. Ramchander every now and then gave





thought-provoking. But Ramchander could clarify his doubt. "True, business calls for some dishonesty and craftiness. Without them, one can't possibly succeed. But one has to know where and when they have to be employed. This will require intelligence and discrimination. However, one has to be mindful of something important. And that is, not to get oneself entangled in anything unlawful."

Rajendra's mind was agitated for sometime. That night he repeated Ramchander's advice to his son and daughter. He told them how one would be forced to indulge in dishonest practices and cheating, as he knew that soon they would be taking over their father's business. They promised him that they would remember his advice.

Ramchander began noticing the changes in the attitude of his son and daughter. He attributed them to Rajendra's association with them and his advice to them. He was angry. "So, you're responsible for the changes in my children?" he thundered. "I was bringing them up on the right lines. All that has changed because of you. They're going bad. I thought I was only giving you some advice how to go about in business. You've now taught all that to my children. I never wanted them to join me or take over my business. I don't like that."

him tips how to carry on business, how to deal with customers, and how to put their money to use.

As days passed, doubts arose in his mind. He sought clarification from Ramchander. "Business is all right and one can earn a lot of money. But there's something I can't approve of."

"What's that?" queried Ramchander.

"What I mean is, if one's business has to progress, one must discard truth and righteousness. I'm afraid, without some dishonesty, business cannot be carried on. Can you be straight forward and do business? If there is a method, will you tell me that?"

Rajendra's query was somewhat



advice you yourself had given me, nothing extra," said Rajendra, apologetically.

Ramchander was not ready to accept his explanation. There followed a serious discussion on how to carry on business. "You told me that some dishonesty and cheating are permissible in business, didn't you?" argued Rajendra.

Ramchander only skirted the issue. "The world exists on business," he said. "The world will be nowhere without business. But that does not mean I want my children to take to business. I don't like it!"

"Why is it so?" wondered Rajendra.

"I don't want them to learn dishonesty, cheating, theft, and other bad things," replied Ramchander.

"That means, you've one set of rules for yourself, and a different conduct for your children. That's not correct or fair, Sir."

"Stop that nonsense, Rajendra!" shouted Ramchander. He could not control his anger. "I can't allow you to stay here any longer! In fact, I was wrong in inviting you to stay here. Also in permitting you to move close with my children. Please leave the place and go somewhere else! I don't want to see your face again. Beware! You're in for trouble!" That was almost like a curse.

Rajendra immediately left Ramchander's house. As he was walking away, undecided as to what he



should do, he stepped on a banana peel and fell down. When he got up, he realised that he had sustained a sprain on his leg. He was unable to walk. A passer-by took him to a doctor, who attended to the sprain. He then asked him how he met with the accident.

Rajendra narrated his experiences. "I'm the son of a leading merchant in Nagapuri. I came here to learn business from Ramchander. I was staying with him for almost six months now, but today he asked me to go away, cursing me that I would meet with one setback or another. Before I realised what was happening, I stepped on a banana peel and fell down."





"You mean Ramchander cursed you?" the doctor appeared not much surprised. "If so, young man, you're really in for trouble! Some mishap or another will dog you every day. Be careful."

"That doesn't matter," said Rajendra. "Now I know where I can get relief and treatment!" he added with a mild laughter.

"You do one thing, Rajendra," said the doctor. "You may go to Balchander. You can stay with him. He's a good person and he'll help you come out of the curse. I can now reveal it to you; the person who brought you here is none other than Balchander!"

Rajendra could not believe his ears.

He straight away proceeded to Balchander's house and told him all that had happened. "My son! Business is not only self-service, but a service to others. It's a sacred duty to society. But you must keep to certain ideals. I would advise you to start some business here. I shall give you money, and whatever profit you earn, we will share between ourselves. What do you say?"

Surprise after surprise for Rajendra. "You're offering me money to start business?" he said unbelievingly. "That, too, without finding out who I am, or what my worth is? Not only that, you say you'll partner with me in business. How come you're so kind-hearted?"

"What a question!" observed Balchander. "You've told me all about yourself. You doubt whether one can carry on business with honesty and righteousness. That's something I would prove it for you. I'm all for experiments and adventure. I feel it my duty to help you. That's how I've taken this decision."

Rajendra was overjoyed. He immediately set about establishing a business and carried on with enthusiasm. The profit in the first month was five hundred rupees. He gave half of it to Balchander. In the second month, the profit was a full thousand rupees and he shared it with Balchander. The scheme went on like that. When he started making huge profits, Rajendra

decided to repay the money Balchander had invested in his business. He calculated its interest till then and took the entire amount to Balchander.

Contrary to expectations, the man protested. "Rajendra, the original investment was by me and there was no stipulation that it was a loan and it had to be repaid. So, there's no question of taking it back. Our agreement was that, whatever profit earned would be equally shared. So, you may continue to give me my share every month."

Rajendra thought that his stand was unfair. "It's true that I started my business with your money. And there was only an oral agreement; we didn't sign any document. I've by now given you much more than that. And you want the partnership to continue? No, I'm breaking it here and now, and we don't have any connection whatsoever in future. I propose to wind up the business and return home."

He came out of Balchander's house and as he was walking, he once again stepped on a banana peel and slipped, spraining his leg. Someone took him to the same doctor. While he was applying a balm on Rajendra's leg, he commented: "Whether it is a curse by Ramchander or a show of confidence by Balchander, the effect will be confined to this place. So, it's better that you leave Mangalpuri and return to your place, or go some-



where else."

Rajendra did not go anywhere else. He went back to Nagapuri. He told his father: "Both Ramchander and Balchander are selfish and cruel. Both of them cursed me and as a result I fell down. I'm not going back to Mangalpuri."

"You're not fit for business, Rajendra," remarked his father. "You'd better look after cattle, or some work like that or go to the fields and be a farmer," suggested Nagendra.

The vampire ended the narration there and turned to King Vikramaditya. "O King! Can you justify the decision taken by Nagendra about his son that he should be a farmer or a shepherd? Rajendra had





described Ramchander and Balchander as selfish and cruel out of his personal experience. But did Nagendra consider one of them better than the other? If so, who was it? If you know the answers and yet remain silent and not satisfy me, your head will be blown to pieces!" the vampire warned him.

Vikramaditya had ready answers: "Ramchander had no conscience of his own. He would speak something, but do something else. He would be sweet in his talk, but a cheat in business. His only aim was to make as much profit as possible from his business; he wouldn't mind going to any extent, be it cheating, theft or even

murder. On the other hand, Balchander was straightforward in his talk as well as dealings. He had clear-cut aims – to earn a fair profit from his business, and he was not willing to employ any unjust means to secure it. Rajendra could not properly assess either of them. His assessment of them was not judicious. That's why he had to suffer mishaps. So, Nagendra's assessment was correct. Rajendra was not cut out for business."

The vampire realised that he had been outwitted once again. He flew back to the ancient tree, carrying the corpse with him. And the king drew his sword and went after the vampire.

● **Blood is thicker than water**

● **The family that prays together stays together**

● **Like father, like son**



Towards Thiruvananthapuram

Text : Meera Nair ♦ Artworks : Goutam Sen

The Periyar and other rivers that flow into the sea carry with them an oily, semi-liquid mud that gets deposited out at sea. When the monsoon breaks, this accumulation of mud gets stirred up and is dispersed below the surface. These mudbanks, as they are called, act as a barrier and keep the water on the landward side calm even in stormy weather.

In former times, Arab traders made good use of the safe anchorages provided by these mudbanks all along the Malabar coast.

From Alappuzha to Kollam is an 85-kilometre journey which takes one through picturesque backwaters, where water lilies and lotuses bloom and waterbirds wade. Along the way, one can stop at the Sri Krishna temple at Ambalapuzha. The rice *payasam* (kheer) offered as *prasad* here is famous.

It is here that the art form known as *Ottam Thullal* originated. According to the story, the poet Kunjan Nambyar used to play the *mizhau* (a large pot-shaped drum made of copper) for the *Chakiar Kuthu*, a narrative art form in which members of the Chakiar community use verses from the Puranas to comment humorously or sarcastically on prevailing social conditions. One day during the performance, the poet fell asleep and he was rebuked by the Chakiar who was performing the *Kuthu*. Nambyar felt humiliated and retaliated by creating the *Ottam Thullal*, an art form similar to the *Kuthu* but with dance steps included.





A mandap inside the
Sri Krishna temple in
Ambalapuzha, where Ottam
Thullal was first performed.

The mizhau used by
Kunjan Nambyar for the
Chakiar Kuthu



In June this year the *Mizhau* that Nambyar had used was installed in the temple compound at the very place where he had staged the first ever performance of *Ottam Thullal*.

South of Ambalapuzha is the coastal town of Kayamkulam, the birthplace of Kayamkulam Kochunny, the Robin Hood of Kerala. Kochunny used to rob the rich to help the poor. The jail in the town still has the weapons used by the 18th-century bandit.

The historic town of Kollam, formerly known as Quilon, lies at the edge of the Ashtamudi lake. It is one of the oldest ports on the Malabar coast and from ancient times, ships of many nations have come here to trade. Pepper was the main attraction. In fact, one of the Sanskrit names for pepper 'Kolam' derives from the name of this town.

In the 13th century, the Chinese made Kollam their chief trading post on the Malabar coast. Kollam, then an independent principality, even exchanged envoys with China.

The holy Sasthamcotta lake in the Kollam district is the only major fresh water lake in Kerala. The Sastha temple near the lake is believed to have been founded by Sri Rama.

Unlike the silvery beaches in the Alappuzha district, the beaches in Kollam look blackish because of the presence of ilmenite, a radioactive mineral. Bauxite is another mineral found on the shores.



Pepper, which attracted
traders from far-off lands

Barely 20 kilometres to the south is the coastal town of Anjengo (Anchu Thengu). This is where the English East India Company opened its first trading post on the Malabar coast. An old fortress built by the early English settlers still stands there.

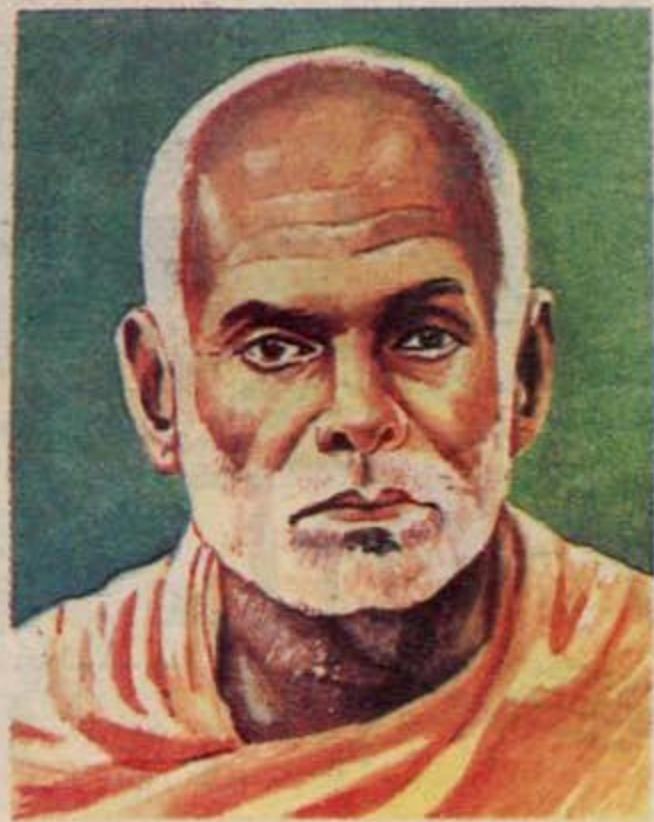
Quite close to Anjengo is Varkala, which is famous as a spa, holiday resort and place of pilgrimage. Mineral water springs spurt out from the sides of the massive red cliffs that rise abruptly from the shoreline.

It was on the Shivagiri Hill of Varkala that Sri Narayana Guru, one of the greatest religious reformers, breathed his last. The guru believed fervently in 'one caste, one religion and one god.' He preached that human beings should constantly improve, whatever their religion.

The Janardana temple where Lord Krishna is worshipped as *Varkalappan* (the Lord of Varkala) is a pilgrim centre for Hindus.

48 kilometres south of Varkala is Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala. *Thiru Anantha Puram* means the abode of Anantha, the holy, thousand-headed-serpent. The city stands on hillocks sloping down to the sea. The city's major landmark is the temple of Ananthapadmanabhaswamy, dedicated to Lord Vishnu. It overlooks the Padma Theertham Tank.

When Raja Marthanda Varma of Travancore made Thiruvananthapuram



Sri Narayana Guru

The fortress at Anjengo





The Ananthapadmanabhaswamy Temple, Thiruvananthapuram

his capital, he dedicated his entire kingdom to Lord Vishnu. The Travancore princes prided in calling themselves 'Ananthapadmanabhadasans'. The present temple was constructed in the 18th century. It is said that it was built in 6 months by 4000 masons and 6000 labourers, helped by 100 elephants. It houses the idol of Vishnu reclining on a multi-headed Anantha. A corridor with nearly 4000 pillars skirts all four sides of the rectangular temple enclosure. Carved on each pillar is the figure of a woman holding a lamp in the palm of her hand. When the lamps are lit at dusk, the figures seem to come alive, giving the temple an ethereal look. A flight of steps leads to a seven-storeyed *gopuram*.

The zoo in Thiruvananthapuram is the second oldest in the country (Calcutta zoo being the oldest). The Sri Chitra Art Gallery has masterpieces of Rajput and Mughal miniatures and has a whole section devoted to the paintings of Kerala's illustrious son, Raja Ravi Varma. There are also specimens of Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and Balinese art on display.

The Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram was formed in 1972. It provides the technology base for India's indigenous satellite launch vehicle development programme.

12 kilometres south of the capital is Kovalam, a crescent-shaped bay. Kovalam beach is one of the loveliest in India. Massive rocks shelter it from high waves and surges.

Kovalam is also the birthplace of Ayapilla Asan, the poet who wrote "Ramakathapattu". Puvar lies almost at the border of Kerala and Tamilnadu. It is here that the Neyyar river which begins 970 metres high in the Agastyakudam mountains joins the Arabian Sea.

The Bridegroom for the Princess



Once upon a time there lived three brothers. Not only were they orphans but paupers, too, with no means of livelihood. Only a tumble-down hut was all that their parents had left behind for them. They were all young, adventurous, and loved each other in their hearts.

"Let's all go out into the world, each one on a different path and seek our fortune," proposed the eldest of the young men, one day.

"Yes," agreed the second brother. "Lingering here will help us in no way. But though we separate, we must

promise to meet again at this spot seven years from now."

"That's a bright idea! Wherever we may be and whatever might be the circumstances, we must meet again, each of us bringing with him something extraordinary acquired during his travels," suggested the youngest.

So, the three brothers bade farewell to each other and wandered in different directions. Seven years rolled by and as decided, they gathered once again where their little cottage stood. They welcomed each other



with warmth and affection and recounted their tales of adventure. Then, one by one, they proudly displayed the treasures they had acquired in the course of their travels.

"From the West I have brought this beautiful white eagle. It can soar higher than the clouds, swifter than the swiftest bird, and carry one to any destination on the earth," boasted the eldest son.

Said the second: "From the eastern lands of fakirs and fantasy, I've got this empty silver pot."

"Ha, ha! A mere pot and nothing in it!" laughed the first brother.

"It's no ordinary vessel but a magical one! Fill it with water and look into it. You'll see all that is happening in distant realms," replied the other with pride.

The youngest brother stood in si-

lence, holding a pomegranate in his hand.

"What! You've managed to gather only a simple fruit in the course of your long travels?" asked the other two.

"Dear brothers, this fruit will remain ever fresh till the last of its seeds is eaten," he replied.

"But what's so unusual about it? Look, we possess some remarkable treasures, while you've got a mere fruit that shall not rot!" mocked the others.

"Any sick person who takes a seed of the pomegranate will not only get cured at once but will also become immune to every malady," calmly replied the young lad.

Soon, they entered into arguments as to whose possession was the most valuable. But they failed to come to



any conclusion.

The second brother poured water into his pot. All three of them leaned over it and peered in. In a far away realm they saw a great commotion in the royal palace. Doctors, physicians, and even magicians hurtled and ran about wearing an anxious and sad look. The fair princess of the land, the king's only darling daughter, was dangerously ill. It seemed beyond anybody's power to save her.

"We must make haste," said the eldest brother. "Now, hop onto the white eagle's back."

So the three young adventurers were soon flying across the blue sky on their way to that distant place. It was not before long that they reached the capital and landed right in the royal garden. They hurried in and presented themselves before a

gloomy king.

"Do not grieve, Your Majesty! We're here to save the princess!" they announced with a graceful bow.

"You sound confident! But mind you, if you fail to bring back the sunny smile on my daughter's face, you'll be thrown into the deepest and darkest dungeon," warned the sorrowful father.

"But if we succeed, Your Majesty?" asked the brothers in chorus.

"Then one of you will marry the princess and inherit the throne, while the others will enjoy important and respectable positions in the kingdom," promised the ruler.

The youngest brother walked up to where the princess lay, frail, and pale. He cracked open the pomegranate and dropped into her mouth a tiny red seed. Soon, she opened her eyes,



the colour slowly returned to her face, and before long she gave one of her sunny smiles to her father. In a couple of days, she rose from her bed and, in the next few days, she was once again sound and healthy.

The whole kingdom rejoiced at the miraculous recovery of the princess. A splendid feast was arranged in honour of her three gallant saviours. The king asked her daughter to choose a husband amongst the young men according to her heart's desire. But alas, each one of them was so handsome, strong, and clever that the poor princess was unable to make up her mind. So, she proposed that it should be left to the brothers themselves to decide who deserves her hand and the kingdom.

"Had it not been for my great white bird, we would have never reached in

time to save the princess," said the eldest brother.

"But my dear brother, we would not have at all known about the sick princess without the help of my magic pot! Neither the white eagle nor the healing fruit would have been of any use then!" argued the second son.

"It was my pomegranate that cured the princess. Not only that, she'll never fall ill again. Neither the bird nor the pot could have saved her in any way," declared the youngest one.

The three youths were themselves in a dilemma. For each of them was convinced that he deserved to win the hand of the fair princess. Finally, they requested the king to make his choice. But when he listened to their story and arguments, he himself became all the more confused.



At last, the wisest man of the realm was summoned and the entire case was presented to him.

"Tell me, young lad, was anything missing from your bird after the journey," he asked the eldest brother after some contemplation.

"Nothing! My bird is hale and hearty!" he replied.

"As for you, handsome one, is your silver pot intact?" he questioned the next young man.

"It is," he answered.

"Now my young master, what have *you* to say? Does your fruit also remain whole?" he asked kindly, looking at the youngest brother.

"How can it remain so? Didn't I feed the princess with one seed from it?" answered the young man.

"That settles the issue! You alone have lost something! Hence you must gain something! You rightly deserve to win the princess and the throne!" declared the wise old man.

Everyone quietly accepted the decision which seemed fair and just.

A magnificent wedding was held amidst much fanfare and jubilation. The two elder brothers of the new king were appointed rulers of two provinces of the kingdom. In due course, they too chose a bride each from the royal family.

Thereafter, all lived happily revelling at the sunny smiles that their queen never failed to give them. For indeed, she remained always hale and hearty!

– Retold by Anup Kishore Das



A favourite of poets

One tree quite popular with poets seems to be the Siris. Kalidasa, in his immortal play, *Shakuntalam*, mentions of the Siris blossom that Shakuntala has propped up over her ear, with its stamens "brushing her cheek". The Siris flowers are very tender, and Tulsidas, in his *Ramcharit Manas*, compares Rama's tenderness with that of the Siris flowers. Rudyard Kipling, who spent many years in India, describes "the little koel, singing on the Siris bough". Strangely, the Siris tree has also earned such epithets as "parrot tree" and "women's tongue"!

Also called the East Indian Wal-

nut, Siris grows to a great height in the forests of the sub-Himalayan region—especially West Bengal, Chhota Nagpur, and the Andamans. It is grown along roadsides as an avenue or ornamental tree. In cities and towns, the tree grows to only a moderate height. The tree prefers damp soil. As its roots are short and thin, the tree cannot withstand storms.

The tree blossoms between March and May. The flowers appear in clusters from the axil of the leaves. They are a greenish white. They put out a sweet smell, almost like that of jasmine. The leaves are divided into a number of leaflets with unequal sides. They fall off in October-November. The tree remains without leaves for a couple of months; they reappear in April. The fruits mature in August-September and by December, the pods become ripe. They remain on the tree till April-May. The wood is hard enough to be made into cart-wheels, and farm implements.

The tree is known as *Siris* in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Gujarati; in Malayalam and Tamil, it is called *Vaga* and *Vagei*; and in Telugu it is *Dirasana*.



GALAVA

A son of the illustrious seer Viswamitra, Galava was a powerful sage himself. One evening, while Galava was offering his prayers, standing in a streaming river, Chitrasena, a princely gundharva, was flying overhead in his chariot. He spat and the spit fell on Galava's palms.

The angry sage complained about it to Sri Krishna. "Chitrasena must be punished with death for his audacity," he demanded. Krishna promised to fulfil the sage's demand.

It was Sage Narada who carried the news to Chitrasena. The gundharva was in utter despair. But Narada consoled him and advised his two wives, Ratnavali and Sandhyavali, to seek the protection of Subhadra, sister of Sri Krishna and wife of Arjuna.

Chitrasena and his wives descended behind Subhadra's palace. They prepared a fire. While Chitrasena stood with folded hands, Sandhyavali and Ratnavali cried aloud. Arjuna was away. Attracted

by the cries, Subhadra came out and questioned the two women about the cause of their anguish.

They told her about the fate that awaited their husband. They said they would jump into the fire as soon as Chitrasena died at Sri Krishna's hands.

Moved to pity, Subhadra requested Arjuna to protect the gundharva. Arjuna threw an invisible cover around Chitrasena with the help of his magical weapons. Sri Krishna's arrows could not pierce the protective shield.

Sri Krishna was surprised. The moment he personally appeared before Chitrasena, he was confronted by Arjuna. It was a strange and bizarre situation when Sri Krishna and Arjuna must fight each other. Alas, the fight began!

But Subhadra suddenly rushed and stood between them. Naturally the two stopped the fight.

Sri Krishna then advised Chitrasena to pacify Galava. Chitrasena went and touched the sage's feet and begged to be pardoned. Chitrasena then asked Sri Krishna not to harm the gundharva.

Thus could Galava's power calm down even Sri Krishna's intervention!



DO YOU KNOW?

1. In which year did Swami Vivekananda attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago?
2. The American War of Independence ended with the surrender of the British army at York Town in 1781. Who was the British Commander?
3. A Hindu religious leader used to condemn blind faith in superstitions and rituals. Who was he?
4. The well-known explorer, Ronald Amundsen, reached the South Pole in 1911. To which country did he belong?
5. An important movement was launched from Shivarampalli in Andhra Pradesh. What was it called?
6. Where is the Nubian Desert located?
7. The National song *Vande Mataram* originally appeared in a novel. Which? Who was its author?
8. Who was Ferdinand de Lesseps? What is he famous for?
9. Who first introduced token currency in India?
10. The famous British soldier, T.E. Lawrence, fought on behalf of another country. Which?
11. An Indian revolutionary died in jail following a hunger-strike. Who was he?
12. Albert Einstein was described as the "greatest Jew since Christ". Who said this?
13. Who wrote "*Natya Sastra*" – an authoritative work on dance and music?
14. A great Chinese leader was the first graduate in Medicine from Hong Kong. Who was he?
15. There is a cave famous for its huge 'Trimurti' statue. Where is it located?
16. Who built the famous American Library of Congress?

ANSWERS

1. Swami Vivekananda
2. Norway
3. Lord Cornwallis
4. J.B.S. Haldane
5. The Bhoodan movement
6. Anand Math in Bengal, by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.
7. Sudan
8. He was a French diplomat. He built the Suez Canal.
9. Firoz Tughlaq
10. Arabia
11. Jatin Das
12. Bharata Muni
13. Sun-yat Sen, who founded the Republic of China
14. Chandrabhanu
15. Elephanta
16. Herbert Putnam





Golden Hour

6

ROBOT COUNT

MARS. 2001 AD

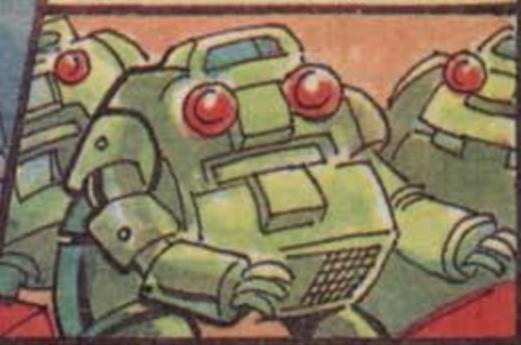
HI EARTHLINGS!
ROBOTS MAKE
SPACE-CARS HERE!

EACH ALPHA
ROBOT MAKES
TWO CARS...

TWO BETA ROBOTS
JOINTLY MAKE
THREE CARS...

54 ROBOTS
HERE...MAKE
54 CARS A DAY...

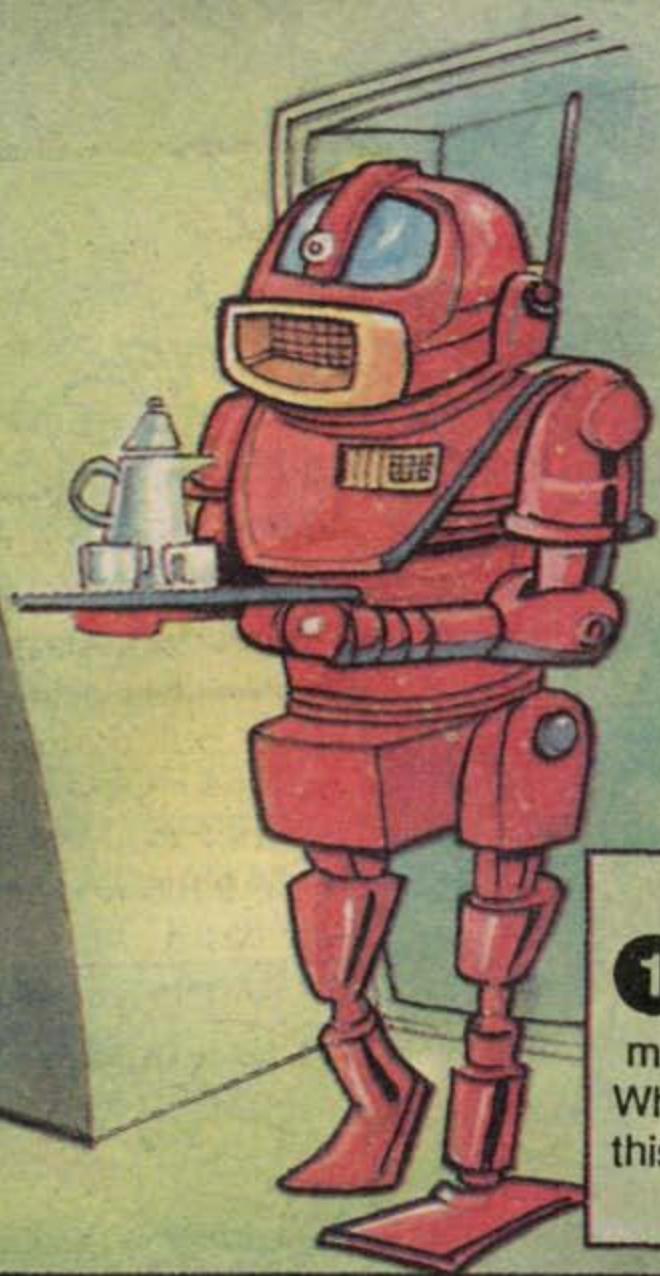
THREE GAMMA
ROBOTS MAKE
ONE CAR A DAY.



NOW CAN YOU TELL
HOW MANY ALPHA,
BETA AND GAMMA
ROBOTS WORK HERE?



Golden Hour TEASERS

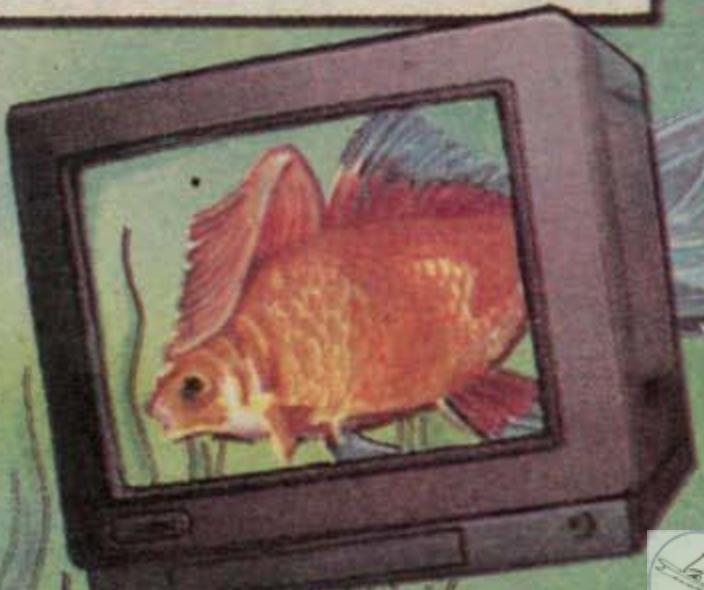


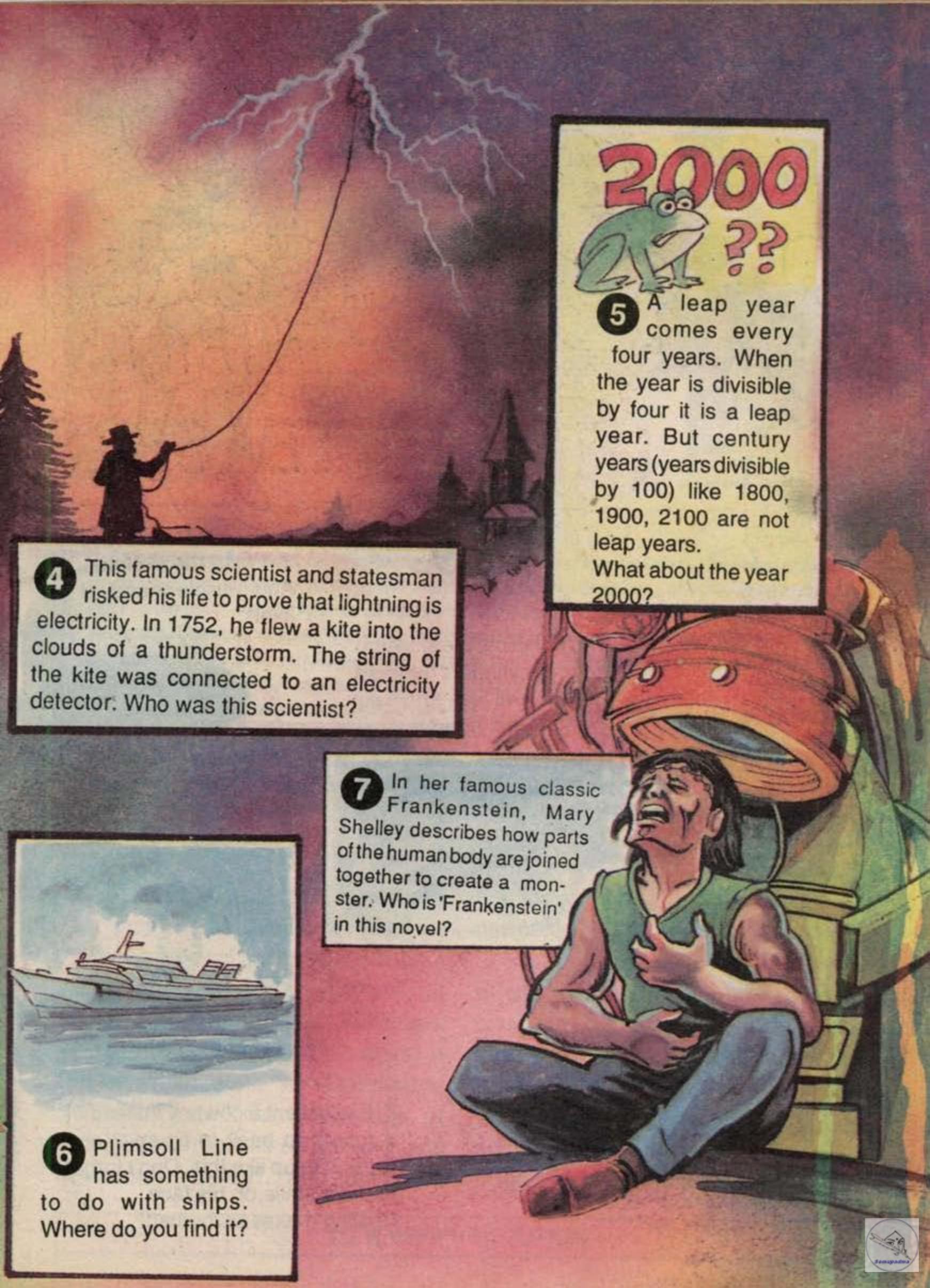
1 The word ROBOT comes from the Czech word ROBOTA meaning drudgery. Who was the writer who introduced this word into our vocabulary?

2 Maglev trains now being developed in some countries can move very fast reaching 500 km per hour. They do not have something that is a must for every conventional train. What is it?



3 Your television screen is a riot of colour. But your TV set uses only 3 colours to produce this multicolour effect. Which are these 3 colours?





4 This famous scientist and statesman risked his life to prove that lightning is electricity. In 1752, he flew a kite into the clouds of a thunderstorm. The string of the kite was connected to an electricity detector. Who was this scientist?

7 In her famous classic *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley describes how parts of the human body are joined together to create a monster. Who is 'Frankenstein' in this novel?

6 Plimsoll Line has something to do with ships. Where do you find it?

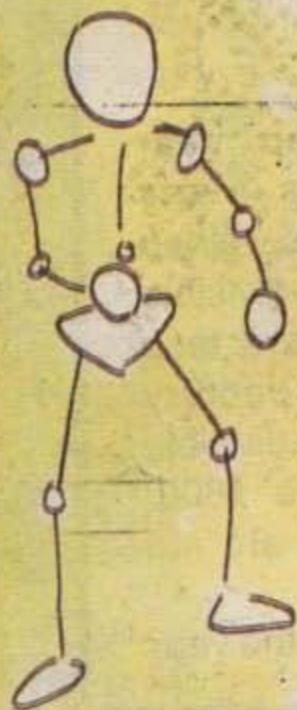
2000
??

5 A leap year comes every four years. When the year is divisible by four it is a leap year. But century years (years divisible by 100) like 1800, 1900, 2100 are not leap years.

What about the year 2000?

Learn to draw a —— Robot

How to draw a robot? Simple! Just break it down to simple cylindrical shapes! Here is how to do it —



1. Draw a skeleton.



2. Flesh out the skeleton. Draw cylinders for torso, arms and legs and a circle for the head..



3. Erase the skeleton. Add muscle lines and joints.

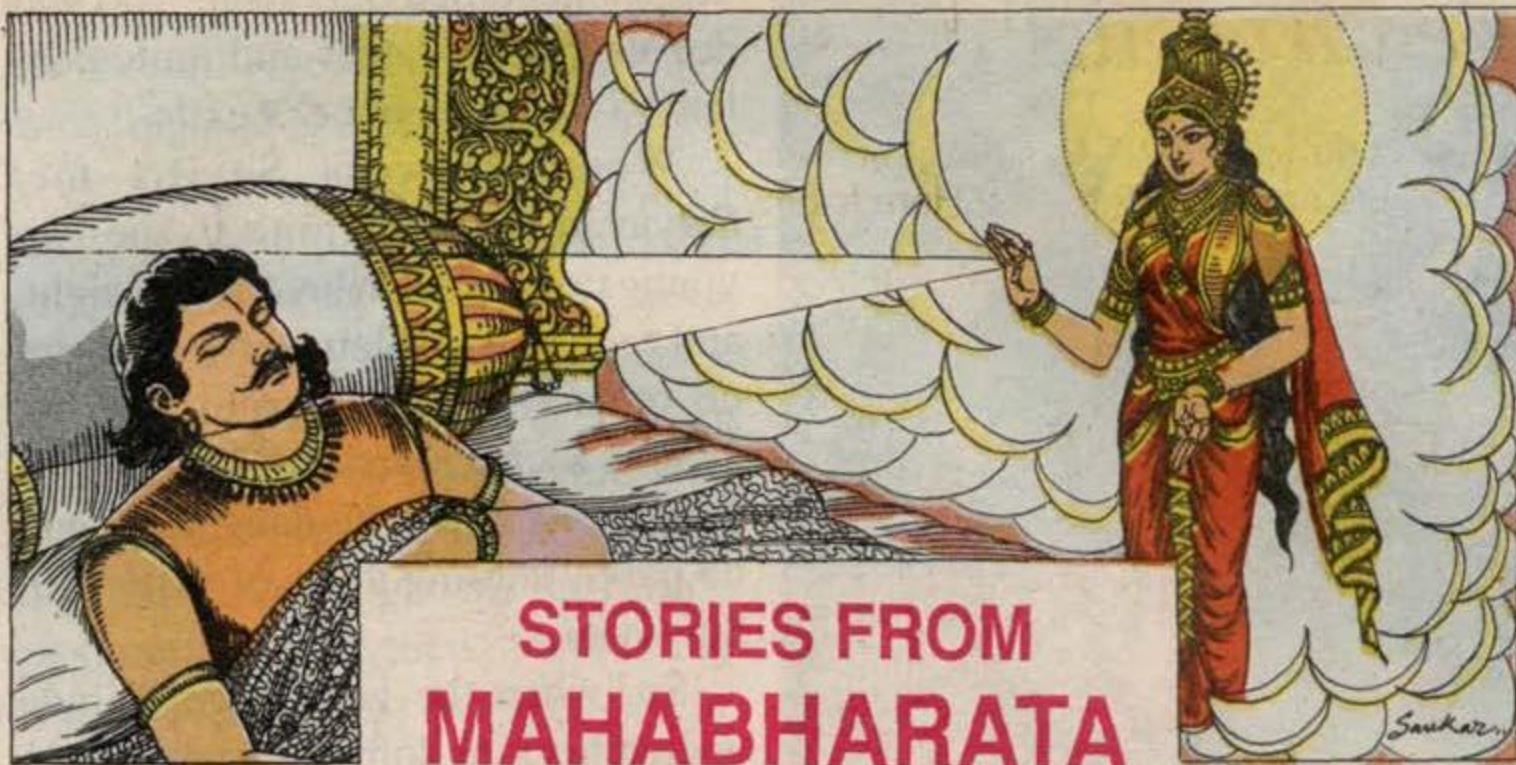


4. Give the final touches to your robot. Easy, wasn't it?



5. If you want a cowboy instead of a robot, go back to figure 2 and dress him up like this. Don't forget to put a smile on his face. Smiling makes us human!





STORIES FROM MAHABHARATA

Saukar...

The story so far...

Suffering many privations, the Pandava princes are about to complete twelve years of exile. Their ordeal will not be over till they pass another year in complete hiding, or if they have to come out into the open, they have to travel incognito. And if they are recognised, then they will have to undergo twelve more years of exile. Duryodhana tries to gloat over the trials of his five cousins. But fate ordains that he be rescued from the Gandharvas, who attack his army, at the instance of Yudhishtira. Duryodhana shamefacedly returns to Hastinapura.

Jayadratha, the King of Sindhu, is eager to cull favours from Duryodhana. He tries to abduct Draupadi when the Pandava princes are away a-hunting. On their return, they come to know of Jayadratha's intrusion. Bhima and Arjuna create havoc among the soldiers of Jayadratha, who is captured. Yudhishtira cautions his brothers against any vengeful act because Jayadratha is a kin of Queen Mother Gandhari. He is shorn of his hair, except for some tufts here and there, and let off.

A few days after the Jayadratha incident, Markandeya visited the Pandavas. When the sage was told of Jayadratha's disgraceful behaviour and his humiliation, the wise man was full of sympathy. "This world is full of wickleness," he remarked to Yudhishtira. "The sufferings of Draupadi remind us of the love and devotion of Savitri. You must hear

her story." Sage Markandeya then narrated the experiences of Savitri.

Many years ago, King Aswapathi ruled the kingdom of Madra. As he was not blessed with children, the king was sorely disappointed and spent many days and nights in prayer. Then one night, the king dreamt that Savitri, the Goddess of Light, appeared before him and said: "Your



prayers will be answered, and before the year is spent, you'll have a daughter."

The words of the goddess came true, and so the king decided to name his daughter after the goddess. In time, Savitri grew into a young woman, of great charm and loveliness. Everyone said, she really took after the goddess, both in name and in her love for others.

King Aswapathi accompanied by Princess Savitri travelled a great deal. In the course of one of their travels, they visited the hermitage of Dumatsen, one-time king, who had lost his kingdom when he went blind and had preferred to spend the remainder of his days in exile. Dumatsen

had a son named Satyavan, who was devoted to his father and quite content to share his father's exile.

When Princess Savitri met Satyavan at the hermitage, the two young people fell in love at first sight, and each took a solemn vow to marry no other. King Aswapathi was not against such a marriage, although he wondered whether his daughter would be happy sharing a life of exile with Satyavan.

So, when the great sage Narada visited his kingdom, the king sought the advice of the sage. As he listened to the king's story, he began to look worried and agitated. In a despairing voice he told the king: "It's all so tragic. Satyavan is a noble prince in thought and deed, but I must tell you, he has only one year to live."

When the king broke the sad news to his daughter, she burst into tears. Quickly drying her eyes, she announced very calmly that come what may, she would marry only Satyavan, and they would share whatever life had to offer them.

So the marriage took place, and Savitri gladly took to the humble way of life at the hermitage. Though sage Narada's terrible foreboding caused her many sleepless nights, she never allowed the worry to show, and did everything possible to make her husband happy. As the months rolled by, Savitri refused to give up hope that somehow a miracle would occur and

Satyavan's life would be spared. Now with only days remaining of Satyavan's life on earth, Savitri spent three days in fasting and prayers.

Her rigorous fasting worried Satyavan. "Where's the necessity for you to undertake such a rigorous fast?" he asked. "Is there something amiss?"

She wiped away his worried look with a dazzling smile. "I'm praying to the Goddess of Light for our future happiness," she replied. "And in my heart, I feel that my prayers will be answered."

At last, the fateful day dawned. Savitri would not leave her husband's side and, when he said that he was going into the forest to chop wood, she beseeched him to allow her to go with him. Inwardly she was all the time praying hard that the gods would not take her husband away from her.

Satyavan seemed full of life as he wielded his axe. Then, suddenly, he staggered and, dropping his axe, cried out: "I feel strangely tired: Let me rest for a while."

As soon as he lay down on the ground, he went into a deep slumber, hardly breathing. Savitri knelt by his side, her eyes blinded with tears. Suddenly, she realised that someone was standing close by. Looking up she saw a tall fearsome figure, draped all in black.

"Don't be afraid, my child," said the figure. "I'm Yama, the God of



Death. I've come to take away your husband." Saying this he bent down and touched Satyavan's face. He then slowly walked away.

Savitri stumbled to her feet, and ran after the god, stopping him by clutching his robe. "Why do you stop me, my child?" he asked. "You know that death is inevitable and there's nothing you can do."

"Where my husband goes, I must go too," she replied in a pleading voice.

The god was pleased at such devotion. "Go back, but ask of me any boon, except the life of your husband."

Without hesitation, Savitri said, "Then grant King Dumatsen his eye-



sight and his kingdom."

"Granted," said Yama, and once again proceeded on his way. But Savitri never left his side, and still clutched at his robe. The god stopped. Turning to Savitri he said: "Where I go, mortals cannot follow. But before I go, I shall grant you one more boon."

"Then let me bear my husband a son," Savitri cried.

"Your wish shall be granted. Now let me go on my way," said Yama and he began to walk again.

"How can I bear my husband a son, if I have no husband?" Savitri asked, holding tight to the god's robe.

Yama smiled at Savitri. "I can see that you'll give me no peace. So go back, and you'll find that your husband still lives."

Hurrying back to her husband's

side, Savitri was relieved to see that he appeared just to be in deep asleep. A few moments later, he opened his eyes and, smiling at her, he said: "I must have slept for long. And I had such a vivid dream of a tall dark stranger carrying me far, far away from you."

"It was only a dream," Savitri said wistfully.

Later, when they returned to the hermitage, they found everyone excited, because King Dumatsen had suddenly regained his eyesight, and envoys had come to the hermitage begging the king to rule his kingdom again.

"That," said Sage Markandeya to the Pandava princes, "is the story of Savitri and Satyavan. The same kind of deep love and devotion you can see in Draupadi."

-To continue





LET US KNOW

What is a bird-hit?

— *Y. Surchandra, Mayang, Imphal*

When a bird comes in the way of a flying aeroplane, it is often sucked into the engine. The damage thus caused to the engine is something pilots are scared of. One can very well imagine the result of an engine failure. Pilots, therefore, try to land the plane as quick as possible, so that the plane does not fly for a longer distance with a damaged engine with a view to minimising the chance of an accident.

Distinguish between 'dye' and 'colour'.

— *Rupesh Shinde, Nipani*

A dye is a substance made from plants or chemicals which, when mixed into a liquid, provides the colour needed for textile printing, and paintings—especially murals and frescoes. The famous Ajanta frescoes are believed to have been drawn with colours obtained from vegetable dyes.

What are 'Inns of Court'?

— *Kumar Nityanand, Chindwad, Pune*

There are four private societies in London—Lincoln's Inn, Gray's Inn, Inner Temple, and Middle Temple. All English barristers (advocates) must belong to one of these societies. They train law students, and there is a common examination.

OUR READERS WRITE

When I was young, I was a regular reader of *Chandamama*. Recently, I happened to see the July issue, and I quite enjoyed browsing through it. It has several stories for children and a lot of information for everyone. I liked the feature on Kerala (Coastal Journeys). "Towards Better English" was fine. It would really help the youngsters to gain good knowledge of English. The editorial, "Need for Quality Education", aptly brought out the maladies in the present day education system. One can only hope that things will change for the better so as to make our great nation march ahead in every field.

— *C. Shyamsunder, Selaiyur*

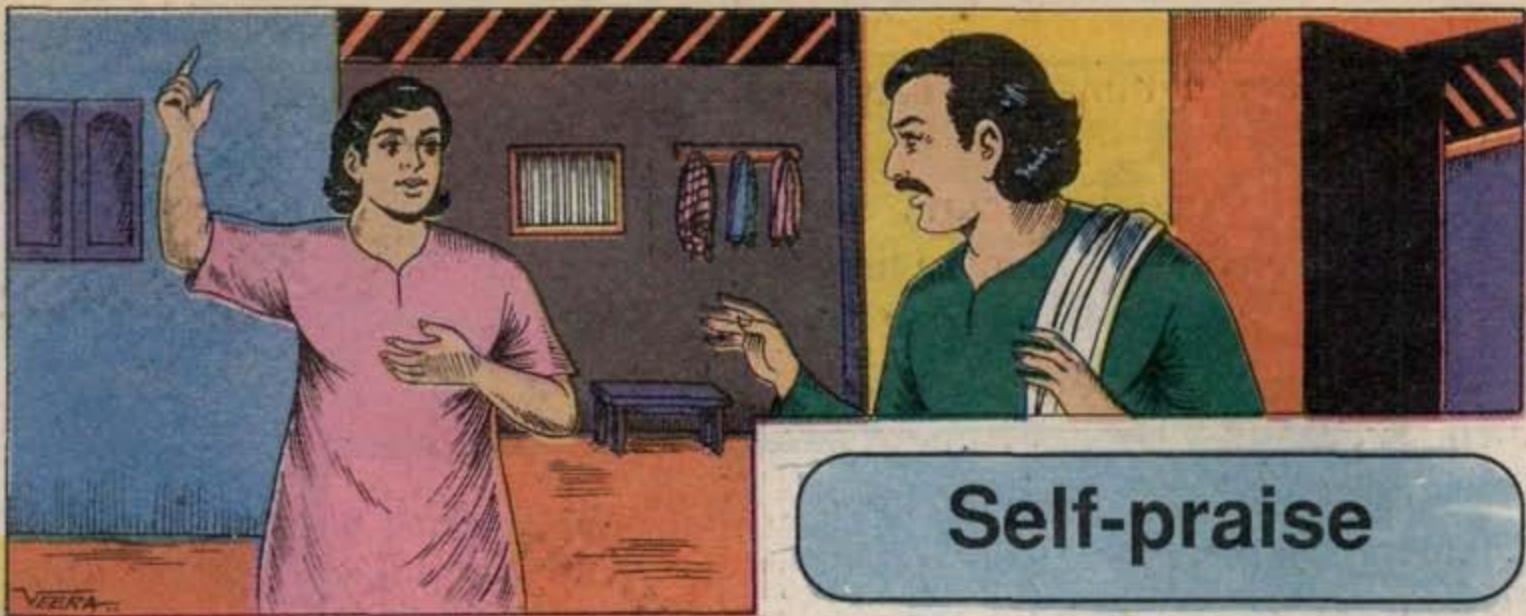
Twenty years ago, it was possible for us to collect the magazine in the previous month itself. Now, we get them only by the 20th of the month. The magazine is now 50 years old. We are expecting more and more from our beloved magazine.

— *M. Harinarayanan, Palghat*

I like *Chandamama* so much, because it improves my English language and general knowledge.

— *S.V. Ramana Murty, Srikakulam*





Self-praise

Bhoopal was the zamindar of Bhuvanagiri. His son Jayapal had studied in a *gurukul* in the neighbouring country and now returned to Bhuvanagiri after five years.

Jayapal was a good boy. But there was something undesirable in him. Whenever he spoke to anyone, he would find an opportunity to refer to himself and his actions and achievements. He would often claim to be superior than many others.

His father always tried to check him and tell him that his attitude was not correct. But somehow the boy could not accept the father's advice and did not abide by his instructions. "I'm only mentioning whatever qualities I find in myself," he would argue. "What's wrong in that? Whatever qualities I possess has been acquired at the *gurukul*. I'm not claiming anything that I did not acquire or I do not possess."

Bhoopal was not very happy with his son's explanation. He very much

wished to reform Jayapal. One day, a relative of theirs arrived from another country. "Madhav, look at my son," complained Bhoopal, "he is always bragging about himself. I've tried my best to bring about a change in him, but of no avail. I don't think he'll correct himself. Why not we together try to reform him? Please think of a strategy."

"That won't be difficult," said Madhav. "You do one thing, brother. You send him to me. I shall teach him good manners and behaviour. I shall put a stop to all his bragging and mend his manners. Don't worry."

Two or three days after Madhav went back to his place, Bhoopal told his son: "Jayapal, uncle Madhav had asked me to send you to his place. I think he has some work to be done with your help. You may start immediately."

"Is it so? Did uncle really ask for me?" Jayapal got excited. Did he say that he wanted *my* help? For that



matter, is there anything that I cannot do?"

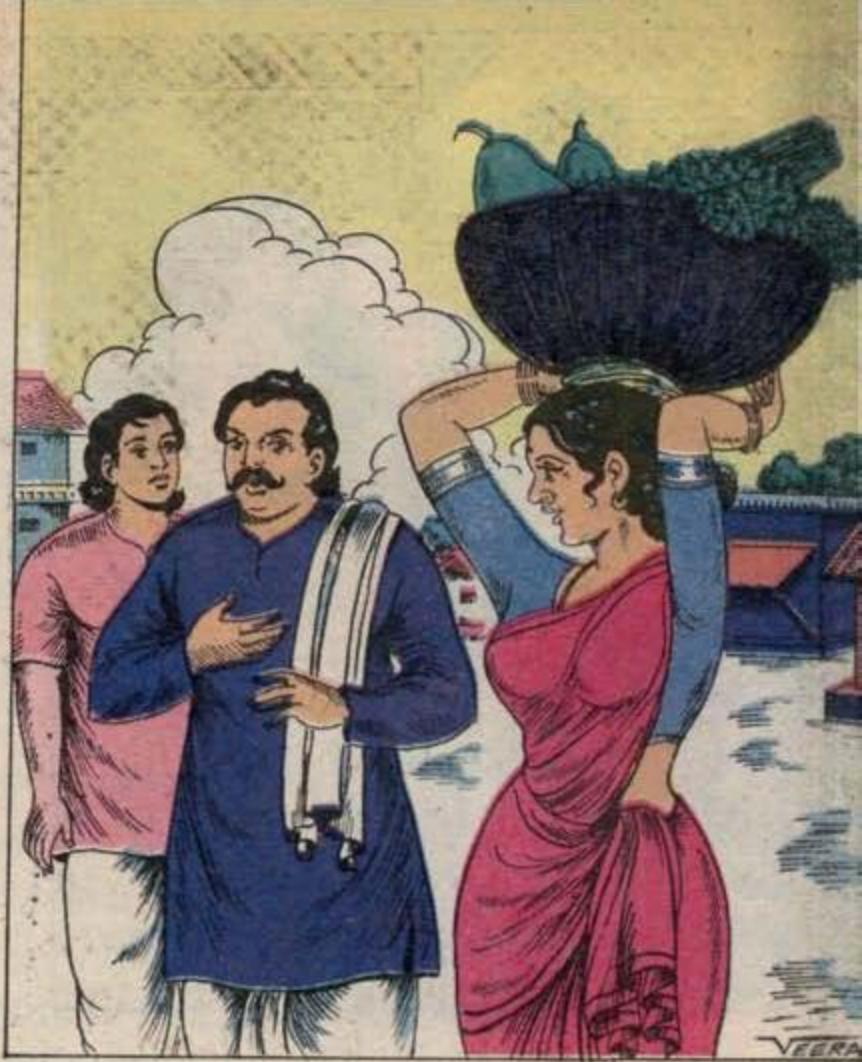
The boy started in a hurry and reached his uncle's place in no time. He greeted Madhav with great respect and enquired after him, and then asked him what assignment he had for him. "I've to go to the town. There's a rich merchant—Ponrangam. Have you heard about him?"

"I'm sorry I don't know him," said Jayapal.

"Strange! There's nobody who doesn't know him or at least hasn't heard about him. It doesn't matter. You come along with me. I shall introduce you to him. Who knows he wouldn't prove to be useful to you in future?" Uncle and nephew then started for the town.

On the way, Jayapal had a nagging doubt: "Is merchant Ponrangam such a famous person? Does he have a better knowledge than what I myself possessed? That could not be," he thus gave expression to his doubts. "I think, even without his help, I should be able to do whatever you want to entrust me with."

"I've no idea how much he is knowledgeable, Jayapal," said Madhav. "In fact, I haven't bothered to find it out. I doubt whether he would even remember me. I've met him only once or twice. Anyway, let's go; I've some work to be done with his help. I must find out whether he would be able to do it for me.



Everything else later."

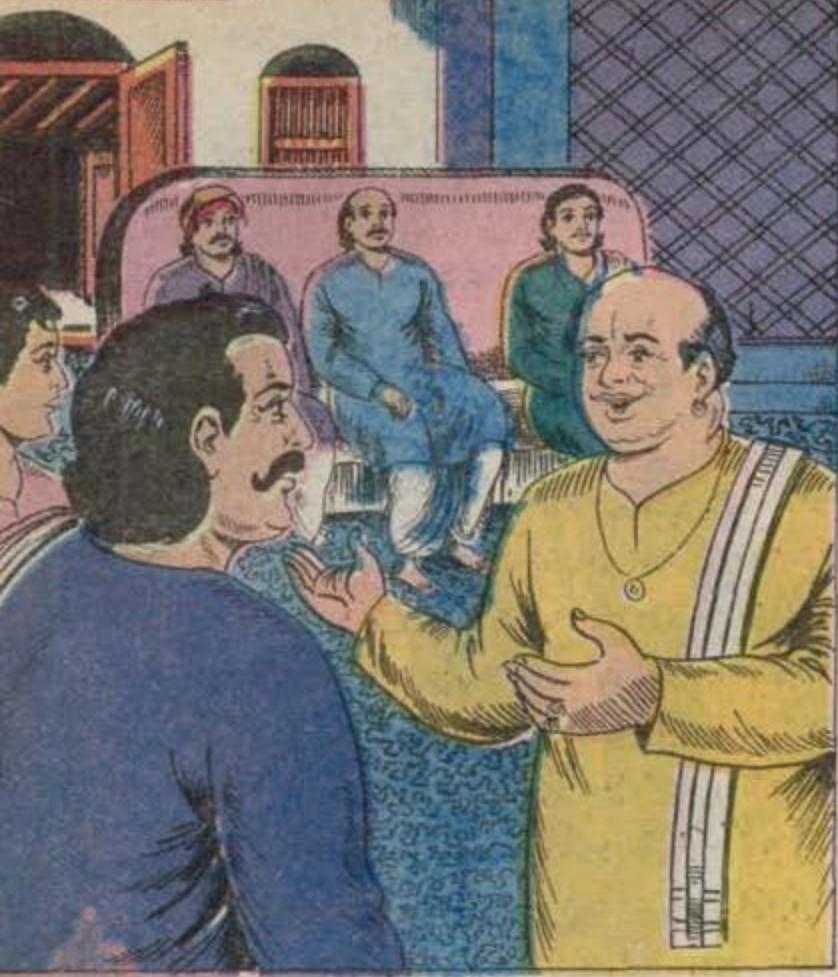
Madhav led Jayapal from one street to another. Ultimately, they stood at the end of a street. "His house was somewhere here," said Madhav, trying to recollect the exact location. "Just now I can't remember. After all, I had come here a long time ago. Anyway let's ask somebody."

Soon a vegetable-seller came their way. Madhav asked her, "Which is Ponrangam's house?"

She laughed aloud. "What a shame? You don't know his house? And a person of such charitable disposition? Even a child will be able to show you his house." She went away without giving any direction.

Then came a respectable person.





"Would you please tell me where Ponrangam's house is?" asked Madhav.

"Sure, that's easy," replied the gentleman, "I can even take you there."

"Oh, don't bother, please," said Madhav. "Just tell me how to reach the place."

The man pointed at the house and asked, "Tell me, who are you? Where are you from? What business have you with him?"

"We're from a distant place," replied Madhav. "We would like to meet him. We have a few things to be got done by him. After all, he's a man of charity and does a lot for others."

"Why should you be apologetic

about it?" the gentleman wondered. "Even in my case, with his help, I was able to retrieve my business. And by the grace of god, I'm doing well. A mere sight of him is like seeing the divine master. He'll remove all obstacles."

"Oh! Is he so great? I never knew so much about him," remarked Madhav. "From what you tell me, I feel he must be really great." He bowed in respect and proceeded on his way along with Jayapal. Soon they reached the place without any difficulty.

Ponrangam was at that time talking with three persons – probably merchants. The moment he saw Madhav, he got up to greet him. "Madhav? What a surprise! We haven't met for a long time."

"It's not as if I didn't wish to meet you," said Madhav apologetically, "but I had a lot of work to complete and I was kept busy. Sorry I couldn't come here earlier."

"Who's this with you, Madhav?" queried Ponrangam.

"Oh! He's my nephew, Jayapal," Madhav introduced the young man. "His father is Bhoopal, the zamindar of Bhuvanagiri. This boy hasn't come to these parts before."

One of the visitors to Ponrangam found the name Bhoopal familiar. "Oh, he's Bhoopal's son? He studied in the *gurukul*, where my son also had studied, and he had brought me news about the boy, especially that he is



arrogant and that he considers himself a cut above everybody else. And he hasn't spared even Ponrangam here. What a braggart!"

Jayapal listened to this comment in utter silence. He felt ashamed of himself. His face fell. He did not say anything in defence of himself and avoided joining their conversation. They all ate with Ponrangam and took leave of him.

As they were walking back, Madhav noticed that Jayapal had fallen silent for a long time. He knew that his nephew was upset. "Why are you silent, Jayapal?" asked Madhav. "Are you upset because you couldn't carry out what you wanted?"

Jayapal now raised his head. "No doubt, you could achieve whatever you wanted, uncle."

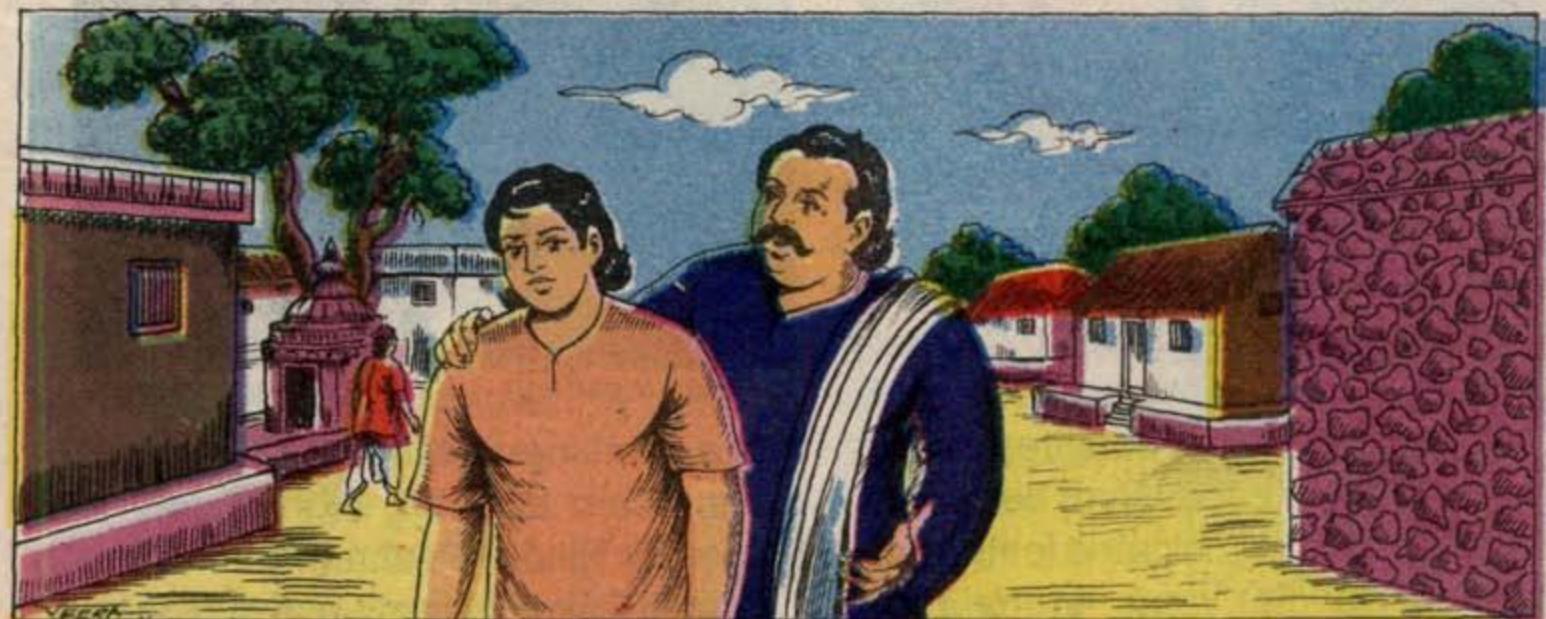
Madhav did not quite catch him. "What do you mean? What did I achieve?"

"Oh! I had understood everything,"

said Jayapal. "You knew Ponrangam's house very well. Still you feigned forgetfulness and sought directions from others to reach his place. And everybody was all praise for him. What his visitors remarked about me has struck deep in my mind. And I didn't have an answer. I saw how a great man like Ponrangam is so polite to everybody and is not conceited about his status and the praise showered on him. All that has been a great lesson to me. The purpose of this visit was only to make me change my attitude and behaviour. And you have achieved that purpose."

"You're intelligent, Jayapal," said Madhav. "You had only one drawback. Conceit. That has been cured. You yourself realised your mistakes. It's mean to praise oneself."

Jayapal was now a completely changed person. Besides Madhav found him a suitable husband for his daughter.





NEW WORLD RECORDS AT ATLANTA

More than a dozen world records fell by the wayside during the fortnight-long Centennial Olympic Games at Atlanta, which began on July 19. The first record was made on the second day of the events, and this came off in **swimming**. Fred Deburghgraeve of Belgium rewrote the record standing in the name of Hungary's Karoly Guttler since August 1993. In the 100 metre breast-stroke event, Fred clocked 1 min 60 seconds to improve upon Karoly's 1 min 95 seconds.

The other records in **swimming**: It was South Africa's first ever gold medal



Penelope Heyns



Denis Pankratov

since 1952, when Penelope Heyns set a new record in women's 100 metres breast-stroke. Her timing of 1:07.73 bettered her own previous world record. South Africa was not admitted to the Olympic Games because of her *apartheid* policy. She participated for the first time, after several years, in the 1992 Barcelona Games, in which she won

only two silver medals. Her previous gold medal was for the same event won by Joan Harrison in 1952 at Helsinki.

A world mark was erased when Denis Pankratov of Russia swam the 100m butterfly in 52.27 seconds. He himself had held the world record of 52.32 sec.

A new record of 3 min 34.84 seconds was created in the 4 x 100 m medley relay by the U.S. team, comprising Jeff Rouse, Jeremy Linn, Mark Henderson, and Gary Hall. The previous record was 3:36.93 to the credit of the U.S. team set in September 1988 in Seoul Olympics. At the Barcelona Games in 1992, the winning U.S. team had clocked the same timing.

Weightlifting: In the 59 kg class, China's Tang Lingsheng set a record



Tang Lingsheng



Naim Suleymangoglu

with a combined total of 307.5 kg (previous record of 301kg in the name of Bulgaria's Nikolai Peshalov).

When Turkey's Naim Suleymangoglu lifted a record total of 335 kg in the 64

division, it was not only a world record but new Olympic history. He was winning his third successive Olympic gold medal in the same event. He holds in all 22 world championship gold medals.



Zhan Xugang

Three world records in the same event by a single performer! Incredible, but true. This happened to China's Zhan Xugang in the 70 kg category. This 22-year-old champion broke the snatch, clean and jerk, and overall marks (357.5 kg), ahead of Kim Myong-Nam of North Korea (345 kg) who had set them at the Asian Championships in April.

Pyrros Dimas, of Greece, broke two records in the 83 kg category – one his own in snatch and total at 392.5 kg (387.5 kg in 1995) and the other in clean-and-jerk.

In the 91 kg class, Russia's Aleksey Petrov lifted 187.5 kg in snatch (total 402.5 kg) to create a new world record.

Akakide Kakhiashvili, of Greece, broke two world records in the 99 kg category, by putting up 235 kg in clean-and-jerk (earlier record 228 kg by Anatoli Khrapatyi of Kazakhstan) and total 420 kg (417.5 in the name of Russia's Sergei Syrtsov made in 1994).

The over-108 kg category super heavyweight title was taken by the 24-year-old Russian Andrey Chemerkin who hoisted 260 kg in the clean-and-jerk for a total lift of 457.5 kg.

Athletics: The fastest man at Atlanta was Canada's Donovan Bailey who

created a new world record for 100 metres sprint – 9.84 seconds (previous record by Leroy Burrell made in 1994 – 9.85 seconds).

Michael Johnson, called the "Texan Tornado", shattered the world record in 200 metres sprint by clocking 19.32 seconds,



Donovan Bailey



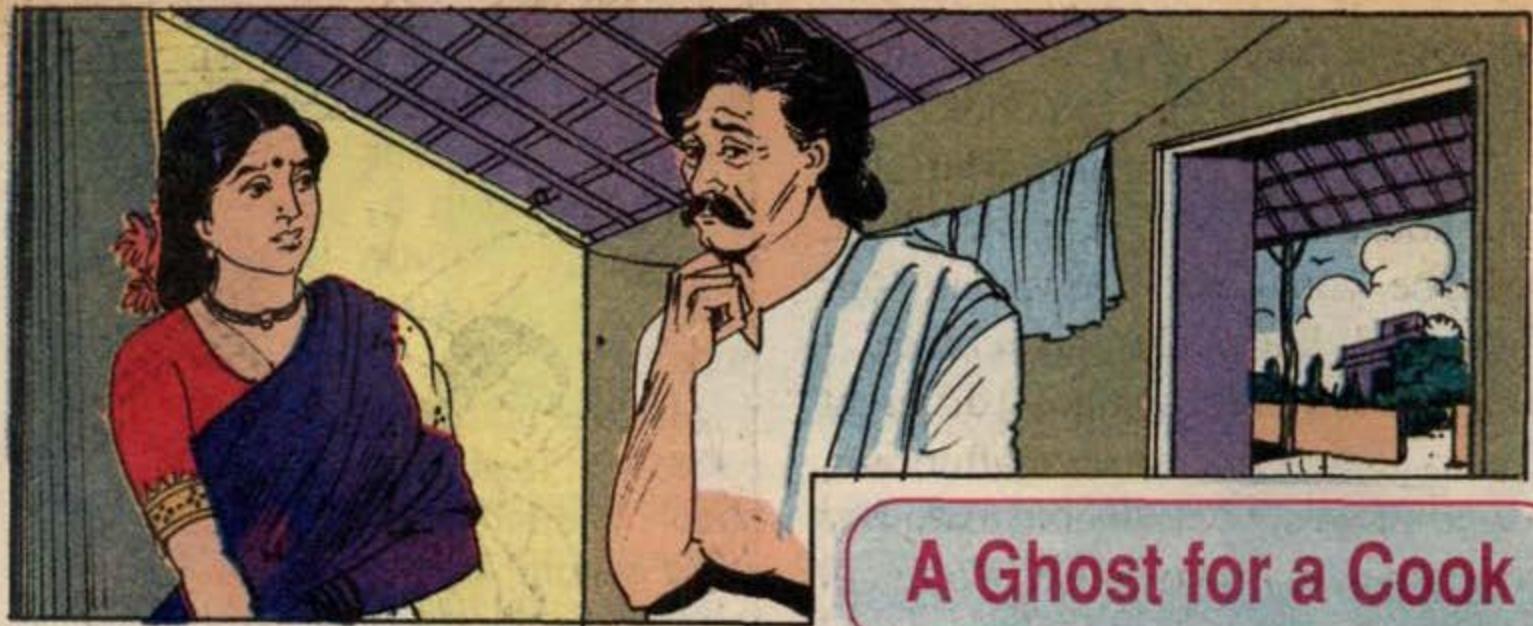
Michael Johnson

improving upon his own world mark. He also created history as, four days earlier he had won the 400 metres in a new Olympic record time of 43.49 seconds. Johnson's historic "double" was imitated a few minutes before he grabbed his second gold, by France's Marie-Jose Perec who won the women's 200 metres race in 22.12 seconds, erasing the record – 21.34 seconds – held by Griffith Joyner in September 1988. She had earlier won the 400 m gold as well.



Marie-Jose Perec





A Ghost for a Cook

Manohar Bhat, of Mangalore, sold his two acre plot, as he wanted money to conduct his daughter's wedding. But Mallika had different ideas. "Father, you've got fifty thousand rupees. Come, let's buy a house and shift there. And this house can be let out and the rent we get will be an income for us."

"Your marriage is my main concern, Mallika," said Manohar. "Everything else will be considered later."

"That's not correct, father," argued Mallika. "Will my marriage take place tomorrow or the day after? Where's the guarantee that it'll take place at all? Should we keep the money idle till then?"

Manohar Bhat thought for a long time and agreed with his daughter's reasoning. He bought the house of Somnath.

He had lost his father very early in life, and it was with great difficulty that his mother brought him up. She

went through a hell of a time during that period, when she eked out a living by doing odd jobs. Somnath roamed about, unmindful of the trials his mother was undergoing. She could not withstand the severity of the chores at home and elsewhere and the abject neglect on the part of her son. She did not survive for long. After her death, Somnath sold their house, thinking that he would go to town and start some business with the money he got for the house.

Mallika cleaned the house and made it look spick and span. She then thought of cooking something and went to the kitchen. She lit a fire, though she was feeling dead tired. She thought, if only there was someone to help!

"Why do you bother? I shall do the cooking for you," said someone from behind her. Mallika turned around and saw that it was the apparition of a woman.

"Who are you?" asked Mallika,



without a trace of fear. "I don't understand; how can *you* cook?"

"You know Somnath, who sold this house to you?" said the ghost. "Maybe you don't know, but your father will know. I'm his mother. I used to work as housemaid at different places so that I could look after him. My grief was, I was unable to do any cooking in my own house. Somnath has left for the town. I wish I could now cook in this house. I shall come early morning and at night and do all the cooking for you."

Mallika could not believe her ears. She was dumbstruck for sometime. "Why are you silent?" asked the ghost. "In fact I don't really need any permission from you. However, if you were to say 'yes', it would give me some reassurance. That's all." When the ghost saw Mallika still silent, she said, "I'm not waiting for your nod. I shall attend to the cooking straight away."

Mallika ran to her father and told him all that had happened. Manohar Bhat was scared at the first instance. "I never knew this is a haunted house!" he said in whispers. "If I had known it earlier, I would not have bought it. We've been duped, my darling daughter!"

"Why should you be afraid, father?" said Mallika as if to pacify him. "The ghost won't harm us. She'll cook our food in the morning and evening and go away, without



troubling us. She'll be a great help!"

"All right, as you wish, Mallika," said Manohar.

Before they could conclude their conversation, they heard the ghost shouting from the kitchen: "Dinner is ready! Please come and eat!"

Father and daughter eagerly walked up to the kitchen. Everything was ready, and they sat down to eat. The dishes were really tasty. "I shall come back before dawn tomorrow and finish the cooking; in the evening, after it is dusk, I'll be here again to attend to the cooking and go away," said the ghost, before disappearing.

As days went by, Manohar Bhat and Mallika had a feeling that what the ghost was preparing was losing





and cook for you."

Mallika told her point-blank: "We don't want you here, anymore. What you have of late been cooking is not at all tasty. So, we shall cook our food ourselves."

"So, you've started finding fault with my cooking?" said the ghost angrily. "I won't forgive you for your comments. Till now nobody had criticised my cooking. You've to eat whatever I cook. Otherwise I won't leave either of you free!" Her threat sounded terrible.

Mallika was in a dilemma. 'What a headache she has created! How shall we get rid of her?' She contemplated a plan of action. One night as father and daughter were eating a late dinner, Mallika's friend, Shanta, peeped in. She had come to the neighbourhood to attend a wedding, and when she was told that Mallika had come to stay in that locality, she was happy and wished to look her up. But she was bewildered when she saw Mallika and her father eating so late in the night. It was almost eleven o' clock. "Why are you eating so late? Don't you know it is nearing midnight?"

Mallika mumbled a reply which did not fully satisfy Shanta. She waited till Mallika got up and then they were engaged in a long conversation. "I don't want to hide anything from you, Shanta," said Mallika, "though when you asked me about a late dinner, I gave you an

taste. Moreover, what was being cooked early morning was getting spoilt by the time they sat to eat their lunch. And in the evening, by the time food was ready and the ghost left the place, it used to be very late into the night.

One morning, Mallika told the ghost, "Please don't bother to cook for us anymore. Your son is in the town; why don't go to him and cook for him? We shall ourselves cook our food henceforth."

The ghost did not like the way she was being dispensed with. "No, that's not possible. If he knows that I'm now a ghost, he'll start worrying. I shall not wish to disturb him. Instead, I would better continue to come here



excuse which I knew you wouldn't believe."

"Yes, I had almost guessed that you were telling a lie," said Shanta.

"I don't do any cooking here," Mallika began an explanation. "All the cooking is done by a ghost. She comes here early morning and again after dusk. In the morning the food is ready before dawn; and in the evening everything gets delayed. And what she cooks really cannot be eaten. She makes such bad stuff. Her son, Somnath, is supposed to be a rich man in the town. I suggested that she should go to her son and help him, but she says if he were to come to know that his mother is a ghost, he may get worried. She does not want to bother him. Look at that. She may be a ghost, still she has a mother's affection for her son. When she was alive, she used to work as a cook, but in other people's houses. We went and bought the house from him, and see the headache we have brought on ourselves!"

Shanta listened to the story in silence. "Oh! Somnath? I know everything about him. He is quite prosperous. He's a friend of my family," she said, and with a smile, added: "There's one way of solving your problem. Would you accept my suggestion?"

"Tell me what it is," responded Mallika. "We shall by and by decide whether the suggestion can be



accepted or not."

Shanta whispered something in Mallika's ears. "Is it practicable? I doubt, Shanta. He's a rich person, living in a town. Whereas I am only a poor villager," said Mallika.

"Why should you worry?" Shanta reassured her. "You leave everything to me. But tell me – would you agree or not?"

Mallika dropped her face, and smiled a broad smile. "As you please!" was all she could say then.

"There are a lot of advantages. The most important is, an escape from the ghost!" said Shanta.

The next morning, Mallika told the ghost: "You need not come here for a few days. Father and I are going



somewhere, for some important work. The place is far off, and so we may return only after a fortnight."

"Did you say two weeks?" The ghost appeared to be quite perturbed. "What important work have you to keep you away for a fortnight? All right, I agree. But remember on the fifteenth day, you both should be back here. If you don't turn up, you'll find the house in a rubble." Once again, a strong threat from the ghost!

The next day, Mallika and Mohan Bhat left for the town. Mallika had confided in him her plan of action. He was very happy to know that Shanta was doing everything for the sake of Mallika. Her marriage with Somnath was celebrated in a grand manner. She spent one week with Somnath in the town. On the fifteenth day, she returned to her house.

Within minutes of her entering the house, the ghost presented herself and started cooking rightaway. Mallika went up to her and said:

"Aunty, your son's favourite dish is onion salad. Will you please prepare that for him? Oh! I forgot to tell you. Somnath and I got married the other day and I stayed with him in the town for a week. That's when I learnt what his likes and dislikes are. Please make onion salad and let him enjoy it."

The ghost got the shock of her life. "Oh! This is what took you away for two weeks? You never told me, not even a word! Has he also come here? If so, I should not tarry here for long. He'll feel sorry if he were to come to know that his mother is the cook here. And I can't brook to see him suffer. So, it is better that I go away. I shall not step into this house any more. I shall leave you with your problems."

The ghost disappeared. Mallika heaved a great sigh of relief. She had, in the bargain, acquired a rich husband. When Shanta called on her, Mallika told her: "I don't know how to thank you." She groped for words.

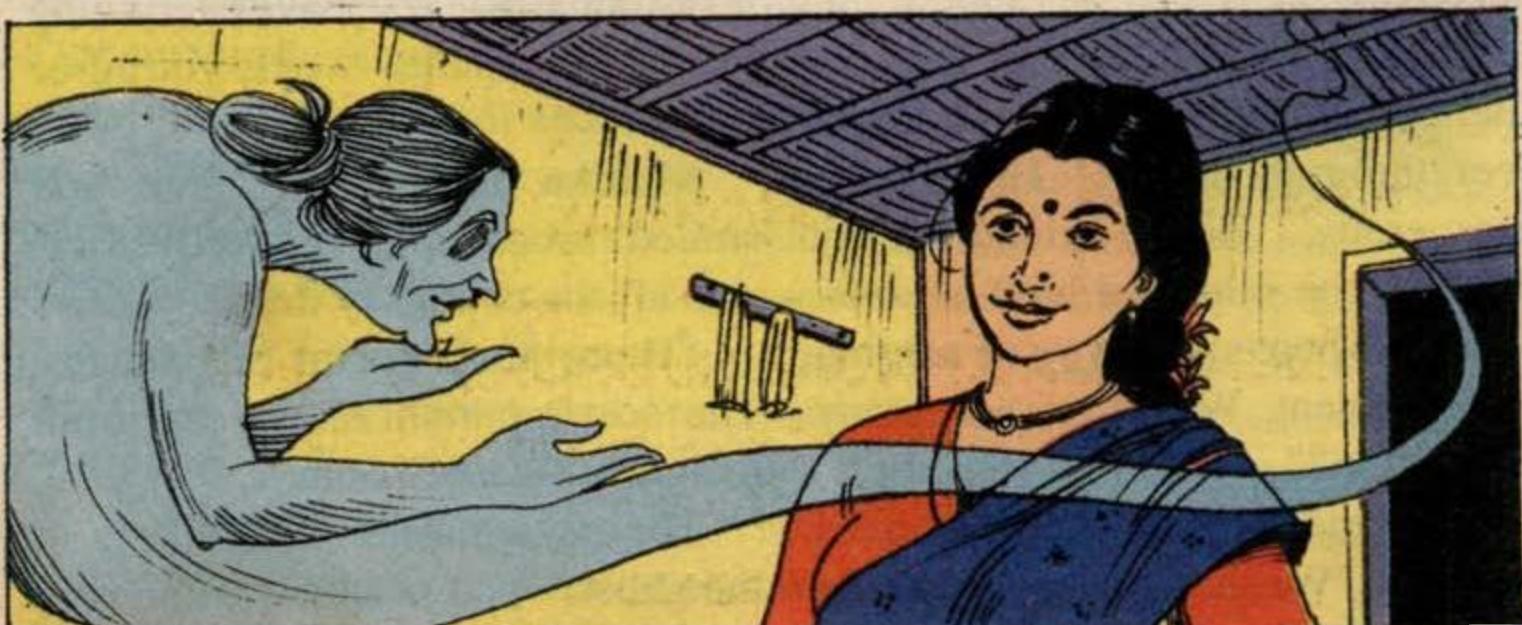


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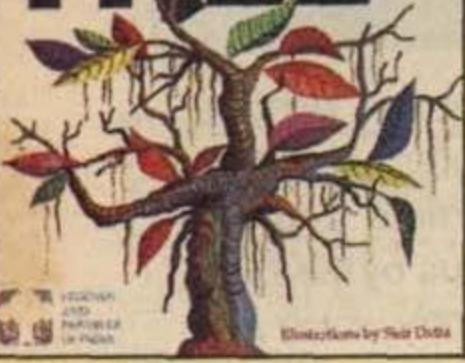
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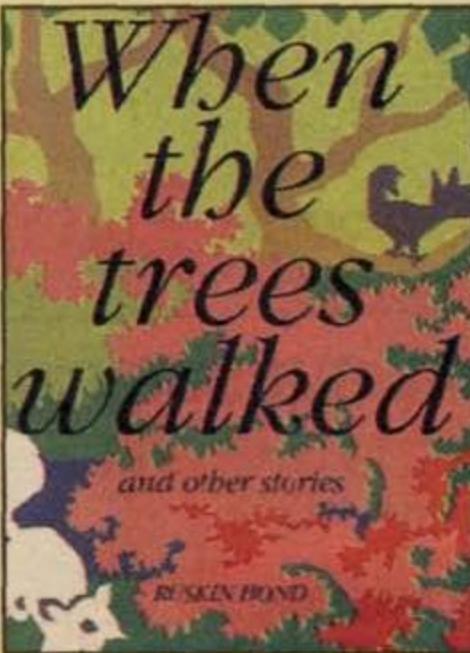
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